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CONSUMING SEASONALITY

Examining variables affecting the consumption of two seasonal products

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Objectives

This thesis attempts to chart the different modalities affecting the consumption of seasonal products. The focus is on examining consumer behavior, as the roles of involvement, brand loyalty, habitual buying and product importance have a clear effect on marketing, purchasing and consumption modalities. Seasonal variation affects nearly all industries with the impacts of weather, the temperate seasons and the holidays on marketing and consumption. With seasonal goods, the roles of traditions, habits and customs are strong. Together, these variables form a complex phenomenon and a challenge for the marketer to address.

Methods

This study examines seasonal consumption through two different product categories: beer and downhill skis. With aim to shed light on consumer behavior, a qualitative study method was chosen. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals representing various roles to grasp the aspects of the research question broadly. The review of literature comprises of two parts: seasonality in business and consumer involvement. The two seemingly unconnected fields of theory are logically connected in the study. The concept of involvement is seen to be important and useful in the examining of consumer conduct in a seasonal context. The two case studies are first examined separately according to the theoretical framework built from the seasonality and involvement discussions, and then brought together for cross-analysis and managerial implications.

Results

Seasonal variation was clearly seen to affect both the beer and the skiing industries. Interesting congruencies were found in the seemingly different products categories. Social consumption is an important source of involvement for both. The roles of traditions and customs guide both the consumer and the marketer and place reciprocal constraints on the industries.

Key words

Seasonality, involvement, seasonal consumption, beer, skiing, consumer behavior

KAUSILUONTOINEN KULUTTAMINEN

Kahden kausiluontoisen tuotteen kuluttamiskäytäntöihin vaikuttavien tekijöiden tarkastelu

Tavoitteet

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii hahmottamaan eri tekijöitä, jotka osaltaan vaikuttavat kausiluontoisten tuotteiden kuluttamiskäytäntöihin. Fokus on kuluttajan käyttäytymisessä, sillä sitoutuneisuudella, brändilojaaliudella, tapaostamisella ja muilla muuttujilla on selkeä vaikutus markkinointi-, ostamis- ja kulutuskäytäntöihin. Kausivaihtelut kuten sääolot, vuodenajat, juhlapyhät ja lomat ovat näkyviä lähes kaikilla aloilla. Myös tavoilla, tottumuksilla ja perinteillä on selkeät roolinsa kausiluontoisten tuotteiden kuluttamisessa. Nämä tekijät yhdessä muodostavat monimutkaisen ilmiökentän, ja haastavan ilmapiirin markkinoijalle.

Metodit

Kausiluontoista kuluttamista tutkitaan kahden erilaisen tuotekategorian kautta: oluen ja laskettelusuksien. Sopivaksi metodiksi määriteltiin kvalitatiivinen tutkimus. Tutkimuksessa suoritettiin kolmesta semistrukturoitua haastattelua alojen erilaisille vaikuttajahahmoille, jotta löydettäisiin mahdollisimman laaja näkemys. Kirjallisuuskatsaus koostuu kahdesta erillisestä keskustelusta: kausivaihtelujen merkityksestä liiketoiminnassa sekä kuluttajien sitoutuneisuudesta. Tutkielma tuo loogisesti nämä keskustelut yhteen. Havaittiin, että sitoutuneisuuden tarkastelu on tärkeä ja hyödyllinen näkökulma, jolla voidaan kartoittaa kuluttajien käyttäytymistä kausiluontoisessa ympäristössä. Kahta tapaustutkimusta tarkastellaan ensin erikseen, jonka jälkeen aineisto tuodaan yhteen ristianalyysissä.

Löydökset

Kausivaihtelujen vaikutus on selvää kummassakin tuotekategoriassa. Kahden lähtökohtaisesti erilaisen tuotekategorian parista löytyi myös mielenkiintoisia yhtymäkohtia. Sosiaalisen kulutus suuri merkitys on määräävää. Samoin tapojen ja perinteiden merkitys, jotka muodostavat rajoitteita aloille sekä kuluttajan että markkinoijan puolelta.

Avainsanat

Kausivaihtelut, sitoutuneisuus, olut, laskettelu, kausiluontoinen kulutus, kuluttajan käyttäytyminen

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hot cocoa, wool mittens and sleigh-rides in the winter? Champagne for First of May, sausages and potato salad for Midsummer? A big part of consumption is seasonal in some way, and many consumption items can be placed in a certain predefined context – a typical occasion, a habit, a tradition, a seemingly logical state of things. These consumption patterns seem self-evident to us, but are they really? Is it out of habit, by intuition or by biology that we seek cold drinks when the sun is shining, or relate a certain delicacy to a certain holiday? Consumption practices are complex forms of human behavior and the study of them requires the analysis of experimental data on consumer motivations, habits, roles and other variables.

Understanding consumers is an essential part of today's business world. In marketing and the world of consumption in general, the consumer acts as a dynamic individual in changing environments and situations. The modern man lives through consumption and therefore creates, renews and sharpens his socio-cultural identity through different consumption choices. Consumption is never an independent act of doing and must always be placed in a context.

The changing seasons represent the natural cycle of the year. We have learned to live by patterns and circularity: September relates to the start of the school-year, new pencils and backpacks, and rejoining the gym. After that comes the anticipated lengthy holiday season with its national specialties, but nevertheless an all-international parade of customs and celebrations – Halloween, Thanksgiving, Finnish Independence Day, Pre-Christmas parties, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's, and many more. The clearly perceivable feature connecting the afore-mentioned events is an avalanche of consumption patterns, from foods and drinks to decorative items and typical sports equipment and other leisure-related goods. The consumption items teach us to celebrate, mark special events and – live according to a natural (or accustomed, at least) rhythm.

In addition to linking certain product categories to certain occasions and keeping track of all the codes of "proper product usage", the consumer still has the task of choosing within the product category: brands, labels, prices, roles,

values, motivations. Different product attributes have their important part to play in the never-ending adaptation of life as we know it. To make things even more complicated, it is common that values, motivations and roles are overlapping. It is therefore up to the consumer to keep track of his own shopping list, but luckily aid is given by fellow consumers, brands, companies, society and culture in guiding through the consuming everyday life of consumption.

In this study, the objective is to shed some more light on the complex relations between consumer conduct and seasonal products.

1.1 Background

The basis of this Master's Thesis lies in the assignment given by the StratMark project of the Helsinki School of Economics, Hanken and TEKES (Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation). The aim of StratMark is to enhance the role of strategic marketing in the business world by organizing round tables, a large yearly seminar and different collaborations between participating companies. This study is conducted as an assignment for two Finnish companies actively partaking in the StratMark project: the sports manufacturer Amer Sports and the beverage house Sinebrychoff. The assignment was received together with another student, Miikka Tölö (Helsinki University of Technology), whose concentration leans towards the supply chain and logistical challenges of the two case companies, whereas this study explores the topic through a marketing angle, more specifically consumer behavior.

The partaking companies had no clear research questions, so such were left for the researcher to formulate. The theme of seasonal fluctuations was the connecting factor between the two companies, but no specific focus was given beforehand. In their contacts with the StratMark team, both companies described the effects of seasonal variation on demand and sales, but it was left to the researcher to further investigate what kind of challenges underline this phenomenon, how to approach it in an academic study and to think about suggestions for further studies, as well as possible managerial implications.

1.2 Research objectives

The main object of research in this study is to explore the seasonal variation in demand of consumer goods. After discussions with the case companies, the scope was narrowed down to two product categories – one from each company. This was done to keep the study on a reasonable level of depth, and it was seen that a dual case study was an optimal balance. The chosen categories were downhill skis (Amer Sports) and beer (Sinebrychoff). The first represents a durable good, where as the second one a single-use consumer item: the idea was to investigate two very different types of seasonal items.

The aim of the researcher was to explore the phenomenon through conversations with appropriate people in the know. After pondering on possible approaches to the research phenomenon, it was concluded that the most efficient way to find information of interest was from so-called observer-types – different experts surrounding the two industries with both experience and views. The choice of methods is further presented in chapter 4.

After initial talks with the case companies and considering the conduction of the qualitative research, the objectives of the study were narrowed down. The main research question was formulated as follows:

How are seasonal products consumed?

And the sub-questions arising from this:

How is the concept of seasonality understood by different individuals dealing with a seasonal industry?

What variables make a demand seasonal by nature?

What kinds of involvement and motivations are recognized with seasonal items?

What attributes affecting the consumption of a seasonal good are interesting from a marketing perspective?

The theoretical part of the study aims to chart discussions of the concepts surrounding the research topic. The two main lines of academic research are seasonality in business, and consumer involvement. The aim of the researcher

was, as mentioned, to better understand the modalities of the consumption of different seasonal products, so a logical method was to combine the discussions of seasonality with discussions of different consumer motivations and commitments. Academic research of consumer and product involvement is in most cases combined with brand loyalty, commitment and other variables displaying consumer motivations and reasoning to consume certain products at certain times.

The empirical study was conducted as a series of discussions with experts with varying perspectives in the two industries. The aim of the data collection and data analysis was to enlighten different views on the topic. The two cases studies were inspected individually, after which congruencies were noted.

1.3 Structure of the study

The study begins with a review of literature. In any research, it is always necessary to understand the context it is placed in, and through which the phenomenon is observed. To gain some understanding of the research issues, preliminary themes must be covered. In an academic study it is also important to present common explanations, concepts and terminology which can then be used as tools to inspect the narrower subject of research. The main themes covered are seasonality and seasonal business, and consumer and product involvement. Themes that arise from these contexts are e.g. the links between involvement and brand loyalty, commitment and consumption and purchase occasions and motivations.

The theoretical discussion is followed by presenting the methods of the qualitative research used, and the analysis of the data gained from this. This chapter serves as a middle-man and introduces the next part – the empirical findings. The findings are divided into two, based on the two different product categories observed – first beer, and then downhill skis.

A theoretical framework is presented with the methods. It sums up the theoretical part and serves as an introduction to the empirical findings and the analysis of them.

After making assumptions from the interviews using an inductive logic, and with the aid of the earlier presented academic discussion, all is brought together in analysis. Research questions are answered and the two case studies are juxtaposed. Finally, conclusions from the study are made and the research method is discussed. Then, possible managerial implications and suggestions for further study are presented.

1.4 Limitations

The aim of a qualitative study, especially on this level of academic research, is not to provide extrapolative knowledge or hands-on tools for management. Although an interesting phenomenon that could easily be studied further, the limited length and thoroughness of this kind of study had to be taken into consideration. A lot of aspects are intentionally left outside of the research issues and a lot of arising, neighboring questions will remain unanswered. This must be accepted as a part of the nature of research.

Some topics closely related to the consumption and demand of seasonal items – for example the current hot topic, global climate change, as well as government regulations – are left for other studies to explore, for simplicity's sake. Taking all possible variables into considerations would have complicated the matter extensively, and would have been difficult to inspect in one study.

Hopefully, some light will nevertheless be shed on the complex research issues, and this study will serve as encouragement to further exploit the subjects on hand.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 1: SEASONALITY AND BUSINESS

This chapter explores the first area of discussion relevant to this study: the theme of seasonal fluctuations of demand in marketing literature. A review of the most common discussions is presented, charting the different ways seasonality has been addressed, how seasonality is dealt with, and what kinds of effects it has been viewed to have on business and consumption patterns. In the end, a summary of the most relevant points is presented.

The main scope of this study is consumer behavior, which has been defined as the "dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behavior, and environmental events by which human beings conduct the exchange aspects of their lives" (Peter et al. 1999). In other words: how and why people consume the objects they consume. This is kept in mind throughout the review of literature, although it must be noted that the matter of seasonality is bordered by several other disciplines: e.g. social psychology, leisure research, quantitative marketing, social history, econometrics, and supply chain management. It is logical that some mentions are made into over-lapping disciplines. All in all, there has been relatively little marketing research devoted to this topic.

2.1 Defining seasonality

To everything there is a season, goes the saying. Well enough, the changing seasons along with holidays, traditions, weather and meteorological occurrences, and the impacts of these on consumption are evident. Seasonal change is a fact of life for most human beings, and easily visible from calendars and traditions. It affects the clothes we wear, what we eat and drink, what sports we practice, and what social rites we engage in. Seasonality can be said to affect more or less any and every industry, as all products and services experience fluctuations in demand. (e.g. Roslow et al. 2000)

Different researchers have used different classifications for seasonality phenomena. "Seasonality" and "seasons" may refer to different concepts and time frames in different researches. Shugan and Radas (1999) define

seasonality as involving predictable and uncontrollable variations in demand over time. The concept of seasonality can refer to a certain period of time – hours, days, weeks, months, or some combination of these frames. Multiple seasonal patterns can co-exist: for example the food and beverage industries are simultaneously affected by holiday celebrations, weather phenomena and time of day. This multiple seasonality is said to magnify the total effect. (Pursley & Howard 1991) Seasonal patterns are not always known and predictable, but yet in many case they are. (Einav 2002)

Below are common aspects of seasonality discussed in literature (e.g. Einav 2002; Radas & Shugan 1998, 1999; Reese 1995; Smith 1995, Starr-McCluer 2000):

The yearly division into four seasons. A natural cause of seasonality is the division of the year into four parts: winter, spring, summer and fall. The predictions are more or less stable, although yearly variation occurs (e.g. the arrival of the first snow coat, which significantly affects for instance the winter car tire market). Historically, seasonal settings affected industries strikingly more; nowadays technological enhancements can help climb over many fences (e.g. harvesting tomatoes in the wintertime, storing hops for later beer brewing). Summer, fall, winter and spring all have distinct weather patterns, as well as social traditions and customs which consumption follows. (Einav 2002; Radas & Shugan 1998, 1999; Starr-McCluer)

Holidays create extreme seasonality – a great number of retailers and distributors have peak sales, for example confectionaries and greeting cards. In the Northern Hemisphere, the winter holiday season is a late-year season that surrounds Christmas, as well as other holidays during the November – early January timeframe (e.g. Thanksgiving in North America, and Independence Day in Finland). (Einav 2002; Radas & Shugan 1998, 1999) It is generally regarded as heavily consumption-linked and also the most discussed in both academic literature and the popular media.

It has been noted that especially in the United States and Canada the retail market attempts to fill in the season-gaps by stretching seasonal events: Halloween items are offered as early as in the beginning of September, right after school year starting items (another seasonal event), and Christmas

marketing is commenced straight after Halloween. Halloween spending in the United States has beamed up by 50 % percent since 2005 raising spending up to 5 billion USD – although still far behind the 475 billion USD Christmas market. (The Economist 2007)

Both advertising spending and price cuts are noted to coincide with seasonal occurrences (e.g. Roslow et al. 2000). Holiday time consumption has lengthy traditions in many cultures. Times are also changing and cultures merging. According to recent statistics, spending in Sweden on gift items, festive clothing and food during the Muslim time of lent, Ramadan, rose to 100 million euros in 2007. (Helsingin Sanomat 2007)

Weather is a natural cause of seasonal changes, affecting especially the travel industry, chemical and fuel companies (e.g. natural gas for heating in the wintertime) as well as leisure, foods, beverages and agricultural products. Although lacking in well-defined cycles, weather occurrences should be viewed as seasonal ones. Weather can be examined on a day-to-day basis, or on a longer scale. Seasons related to natural events are often easily predicted and observable. Although weather itself is unpredictable, its impacts on a certain business or industry or demand modality are known. A stereotypical weather influence relates to the linking of hot drinks, hot food and warm clothing in cold weather – and the opposite in warm weather. (Einav 2002; Radas & Shugan 1998, 1999; Starr-McCluer 2000) Seasonal impact on consumer behavior has been seen to be more drastic in markets where seasonal changes in temperature are severe (such as warm southern countries and the cold North). (Roslow et al. 2000).

Inspecting weather effects on sales has received some criticism due to the fact that real, mathematical correlation is hard to identify. Starr-McCluer (2000) suggests that weather-related systematic fluctuations have more to do with exaggerations and departures from the seasonal cycle than with actual economic models, and states that no systematic analysis of weather effects exists. Although Starr-McCluer was able to find correlations between weather fluctuations and product consumption in certain industries, it was concluded that other variables account for determining the overall effect alongside weather sensitivity. It was concluded that, “without related data on prices or

physical quantities of goods, it is hard to determine with any precision the relative importance of such effects.”

Industry traditions create buzz around related products. For example, baseball equipment sales rise during baseball season and in Europe winter sports events can help sales with related items such as skis and snowboards. Retailers can plan marketing actions in accordance to ongoing events, like campaigns during the Olympic Games. New product introductions are often made at peak-demand occasions and according to well-known rhythms. (Einav 2002; Radas & Shugan 1998, 1999)

Government actions can also cause seasonal fluctuations in demand. For example, tax refunds cause a lift in durable sales. (Radas & Shugan 1998)

2.2 Psychological seasonality and social traditions

An important viewpoint to seasons is that their durations are often psychological. Vicary (1956) found that psychological seasons anticipated and preceded actual calendar seasons. Winter was conceived to be only two months long (mid-November to mid-January), regardless of weather. Some spring-orientation was found as early as mid-January, and was found to last until as long as June. The reasons for this mindset lie in cultural influences, advertising, happenings and campaigns that “force” the seasons to commence prematurely. The major holidays have a significant influence on seasonal psychology (Smith 1995). In the United States, most of the country considers summer to end in Labor Day (the first Monday in September). Likewise, winter is thought to start from Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday of November). As a lot of seasonal behavior is non-dependent on weather, the term **psycho-seasonality** has been introduced. Many patterns are habitual: fashion shows take place in spring, new car shows in the fall and weddings in June and July. (Vicary 1956) The heavy consumptional aspect of seasons does its best to prolong them. (The Economist 2007)

Habits and traditions play a big part in the effects of seasonality on consumption: it is hard to measure whether a trigger is “real” (e.g. quenching

thirst in the heat with water) or habitual (e.g. drinking beer in the heat). Consumption is to a large extent related to social practices and traditions (Olsen 2007). Some studies on weather data have been conducted from a statistical perspective, but this study, as said, concentrates on more general knowledge. Berkowitz (1986) found that seasonal variation is especially evident in outdoors-related consumption items such as sports products and garden equipment, in other words, when the item is clearly linked to a certain seasonal condition.

Radas and Shugan (1998) divide the bases of seasonality into two blocks: **exogenous** ones (weather, periodical events such as holiday celebrations and their related consumption practices) and **endogenous** ones ("seasonal by habit", i.e. when consumers are accustomed to purchasing and consuming at a certain time or in a certain manner and habit).

2.3 Seasonal influences in marketing

Seasons live strong in people's minds and produce powerful marketing communications elements: snowflakes, summer sunshine, Santa Claus, advent candles and Halloween jack-o'-lanterns are easily recognizable signs that guide consumption. Wildt (1975, see Roslow et al. 2000) showed that marketers of food products profit from including seasonal elements into their campaigns. Due to the plethora of variables affecting consumption at given times, the role of seasonality is however not always clear. Arnold et al. (1983) discovered that grocery shoppers were not influenced by the seasonal changes *per se*, but rather that consumers were influenced by strictly situational factors, such as store locations, value pricing and available assortment. Roslow et al. (2000) state that it is not always evident whether seasonality defines the impact of a situational factor, or whether they just happen to coincide.

One view arising in some literature is treating seasonality as a contaminant or "systematic noise". Data can be analyzed using a de-seasonalized model, but this does not remove the challenge of understanding seasonality. It is in many cases unclear whether seasonality affects other variables other than sales, thus making an implicit assumption on the affects of seasonality. It implies that,

for example, high seasons produce new buyers who have the same awareness and knowledge as the old buyers from the previous period. Instead of seeing seasonality as something to filter out to see actual results, a parallel take is seeing seasonality as the “black-box” – the key to understanding. (Einav 2002, Shugan & Radas 1999) The black-box approach is also the approach of this study.

Reese (1995) criticizes that seasonality studies merely offer some direction on when to target customers. This outlook states that seasonality studies are not scientific, but are nevertheless useful in making demand prognostics through historical data – benchmarking takes the place of determined heuristics, which can be useful. Culture and customs play a big part: an example is planning book club marketing around holidays, because people have more time to read in the summer. Seasonality studies do not provide leak-proof solutions through scientific patterns, but do serve in providing guidelines for businesses. Then again, the important role of consumer studies is to produce more understanding, and not find mathematical congruencies.

2.4 New product introductions

A useful, and much used, manner to examine seasonal demand is through new product introductions. It is seldom by coincidence that a new product is released to the market: when to release a movie, when to enter the market with an enhanced downhill ski or when to launch a line extension of a beverage brand. The meticulous mannerisms regarding the timing of a product launch hit the core in examining seasonal consumption behaviour, telling us about the balance of involvement in a consumption situation, habitual buying, seasonal changes and the **conflicting role of push and pull marketing**.

Introducing novelty items or variations to the consumer market is a tricky optimization process in many industries. According to a **market size interpretation**, high seasons increase the size of a market. Nevertheless, consumers do not necessarily respond linearly to market stretching. A better outcome is adjusting purchase probability at all times, and marketing mix variables are needed. It is, however, agreed on that off-peak introductions have

better awareness and visibility, although to a smaller audience. A **transformation model of seasonality** means the effect of multiple parties introducing products or services simultaneously during a peak: the introduced items age more quickly. As in all marketing, it is better to stay constantly active than live by drops or peaks. (Einav 2002)

Infrequently purchased products follow different heuristics than frequent ones (Berkowitz 1986):

- The newest brands in a product category, when compared to dominant brands, will be subject to higher seasonal variation in consumer awareness, advertising recall, product attribute positioning, and purchase intent.
- Differences between product attributes for competing brands will be most apparent to consumers during periods of peak seasonal activity.
- Perceptions of product attributes that are most important in the buying decision are subject to the least seasonal variation. The article also demonstrates how seasonal variations may be charted and discusses how this analysis contributes to the overall management of the new product.

In comparison, it has been noted that mature products are not subject to such variation in brand preference and demand remains more constant despite of seasonal changes – although the amounts consumed can differ according to weather. (Beckwith 1972, see Roslow 2000) Generally, mature products and well-known brands can launch more freely than less-known concepts. (ref.)

Consumers purchase more or less of their product choices from season to season, but stick with the same brand. The research implies that non-brand related variables affect the consumption of grocery items in explaining the variation between seasons. (Knox & Walker 2003)

Individual companies rarely change the demand pattern for a certain product, but a group of companies might be able to succeed in this, even leading to permanent demand shifts. (Shugan & Radas 1999) Sometimes even strong

individual products can change a pattern. For example, movie hits have been popular enough to change an industry's seasonal pattern i.e. releasing at an uncommon occasion. It is however noted that distributors, producers and marketers also rely on patterns themselves, because nobody is willing to take the risk of failing while attempting unusual launch timing. This kind of decision making can be called "**bounded rationality**". Motion pictures are typically seasonal products: the number of (American) consumers who go to the movies varies significantly within the lapse of a year – even doubling within a period of two weeks. On average, the opening week of a screening accounts for almost 40 percent of box office revenues. This said, movie marketers are extremely concerned with the release mechanism of a new movie, and follow patterns religiously without taking any risks. (Einav 2002)

Often the case is that a company has to think about whether to **launch or wait** (for instance, the summer or a holiday season for a soft drink). Then again, launching now has the advantage of less competition and the beginning of an exponential demand curve – compared to the start-off boost, which may be followed by a downward trend. One heuristic is to wait for the high season when a significant difference between low and high season demand exists – larger differences will bring more acute increases in sales. Then again during a high season, a product ages faster than during a low season. (Shugan & Radas 1999) Seasonal consumer products cannot always wait when the items are already produced: the manufacturer is stuck with non-sold items until the next round – and often the next round is not applicable anymore (e.g. confectionaries relating to a holiday). (Buxey 2005) Judging from literature, the underlying equation to be optimized seems to be releasing when competition is low enough not to interfere with preference, but high enough to enhance general interest in a product group.

Axaroglou (2003) discusses that timing is at utmost importance in new product introductions. Product introductions are often characterized as uncertain, dynamic processes in an oligopolistic market situation. The common aim is to attempt to introduce the new film during a holiday season to profit from the maximized interest. There are many cases of movie releases being postponed significantly to the next high demand point because of delays in production, even though a hype is already out. Another issue is observing the competitors

and their introductions when considering the exact timing of a launch. Larger scale fluctuations also affect industries: Devinney (1990, see Axarloglou 2003) discovered that introductions accelerate in the anticipation of an economic revival.

The concept of demand shifting refers to smoothening out demand over time, i.e. away from the peaks. It is not always easily determined whether elevated demand is actually an overheated one during a peak, i.e. exceeding capacity. Demand shifting strategies can, however, decrease overall profits when their costs exceed the benefits, such as massive marketing communications efforts. Bundling can be seen as a reverse shifting strategy, when e.g. providing high loyalty, high season customers benefits that they can use during off-peak seasons – e.g. frequent flyer programs for airlines, where demand is shifted to the peaks, generating greater profits. According to this type of strategy, it is better to enhance peak demand and be able to charge a higher price in doing so. (Axarloglou 2003)

2.5 Applying seasonality studies

Buxey (2005) reminds that different product categories can and should be examined when mapping out the concept of seasonality in terms of consumer behavior – a consumption practice should not be generalized. Also, it is not always evident whether seasonality defines the impact of a situational factor, or whether they just happen to coincide. (Einav 2002, Roslow et al. 2000) This is a point that will be addressed again when reviewing the results of the empirical study.

Although the study of consumer behavior is essential in marketing, marketers cannot expect consumers to act along a strict logic – which forms a logic of its own. The type of customers may also vary from season to season. What more, the same customers may possess differing consumption patterns from season to season. And, the same products may be consumed differently at different times. (Shugan & Radas 1999)

2.6 Chapter summary

The table below sums up the most relevant points of this chapter:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nearly all products and industries experience seasonal fluctuations in demand.• The most common seasonal contexts are: the yearly seasons (summer, fall, winter, spring), holidays, weather occurrences and industry traditions.• Seasons are often psychological in duration.• The exact effects of seasonal changes are hard to measure.• Seasons and their associations live strong in consumers' minds.• The optimization of the timing of a new product introduction in a seasonal context is tricky.• Strict patterns and habits constrain both demand and supply, and their relation is not unambiguous.• It is not always known whether the market acts according to a push or pull logic.

Table 1: Seasonality and business

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE PART 2: CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT

This second part of the literature review explores the theme of involvement in consumer behavior research. As was introduced, this part acts as a unifying entity between the theme of seasonality and the research question of describing consumption modalities in a seasonal context.

The concept of involvement is strongly linked to many fields of marketing – more closely through a **consumer behavior** context. It is closely tied to often vague terms such as meaning, commitment, importance, attachment and loyalty – in the contexts of both consumers and objects of consumption (products and services), as well as brand loyalty, habitual buying and consumption occasions. In this chapter I attempt to sum up these bordering concepts in a way necessary for the empirical study. The concept of involvement was chosen to carry through the whole chapter, as it was seen useful in mirroring and juxtaposing various neighboring concepts.

Research on consumer behavior has explored the complex processes of purchasing, since consumers do a lot more than just go out and buy: they engage in imaginative, emotional and appreciative consumption experiences. (Havitz & Mannell 2005) Studying the consumer is essential: products are not semantically involving, consumers are. (Traylor & Joseph 1984, see Quester & Lim 2003)

One of the most widely accepted tenets of consumer behavior studies is that consumers view different products to be differently important. According to Howard and Sheth (1969, see Clarke & Belk 1979) this influences the decision making process of the consumers and level of effort leading to purchase. Havitz & Mannell (2005) claim that involvement research is more relevant in leisure activities as opposed to non-leisure. Nevertheless, the advantages of involvement classifications lie in the aims of consumer behavior research in general: one can segment markets by different levels of involvement. Although a high involvement is worth striving for, low involvement is not a concept in vain marketing-wise: it is important in developing advertising strategies (Rothschild 1984).

3.1 Defining involvement

Involvement in marketing has to do with the way consumers search, assess, purchase and use consumption items. (Mascarenhas et al. 2004) The ways in which consumers are involved with products or services is a theme of great lengths of discussion in the field of consumer research. Definitions vary – some say that involvement reflects the interest evoked by the product, but others note that involvement has to do more specifically with relating the product to important self-values, such as those of personal needs or self-concept (e.g. Houston and Rothschild 1978). It is agreed that different product classes evoke different levels of involvement. (Bloch 1981) Although at times varying in meaning and purpose, all of the terminology refers to help explain people's stable and continuing consumption preferences, choices and participation to aid in planning, marketing and managing service delivery. (Havitz & Mannell 2005)

A commonly accepted definition is:

***"Involvement** is an internal state variable that serves as the immediate step between perceptions of importance and overt action."* (Bloch & Richins 1983)

The concept of involvement has been broken down with various terms with varying connotations. Among the most common are: ego involvement, product involvement, brand involvement, enduring involvement, response involvement, situational involvement, low involvement, high involvement and purchase involvement. Often the terms are used as **dualisms**, of which the most useful are high vs. low involvement and enduring vs. situational involvement.

The recognition of involvement modalities is important to the marketer: in order to build more lasting relationship with the consumers, one must struggle to relate personal importance, especially to reach the detached and disinterested segments (Bloch & Richins 1983). Richins et al. (1992) bluntly put that "no-one cares about products such as paint or ketchup". Then again, the world of the new millennium has seen fierce branding efforts on such generic products as water (Kivistön Kirkas), bread (Fazer) and pencils (Stabilo), which implies that to be able to compete, marketers must do their best to relate emotional motivations even to "less important" products.

3.2 Involvement and importance

The terms involvement and **importance** often collide and overlap in marketing literature. Thus, it is relevant to study the connection of the two. Traditionally, perceived importance has been linked to price attributes, e.g. the purchase of automobiles is more important than the purchase of facial tissues (Hupfer and Gardner 1971, see Bloch & Richins 1983). Importance has been seen as a prerequisite to involvement (Havitz & Howard 1995). Laurent & Kapferer (1985) demand a clear separation; rhetorically asking whether product importance gives enough justice to the complexity of the involvement concept.

Bloch & Richins (1983) separate the terms by stating that importance reflects the consumer's perception that his actions concerning a product matter, and therefore represents a cognitive state of awareness and realization. Involvement may be thought of as the motivational state that results from the stimulus of product importance perceptions.

Celsi and Olson (1988) argue that although the importance of the discourse on involvement is commonly understood, the motivational role of involvement in attention and comprehension processes is not. In short, if there are personal characteristics associated with the product, the consumer will experience involvement with the product. When this knowledge is activated, the consumer is motivated to search and to shop, thus displaying overt behaviors as well as attention or comprehension, which are cognitive behaviors.

Felt involvement is a person's subjective experience or feeling of personal relevance. This reflects the experimental, phenomenological nature of involvement. Felt involvement is transitory and can fade and alter due to many reasons – such as due to distraction or not being current anymore. Consumers have the ability to process information in their environments – relevant information can be retrieved from memory. This motivation to process information has often been conceptualized as involvement with the informational stimuli. (Celsi and Olson 1988)

Tyebjee 1979 (see Bloch & Richins 1983) noted that the level of involvement depends on the number of values engaged by the product and the centrality of these values to the consumer. This school of thought says that involvement

exists whenever an issue or object is related to the unique cluster of attitudes and values that constitute a person's ego.

Involvement levels are not static as consumer interests can change. Bloch and Richins (1986) describe an evolving enduring involvement as "when a teenager's involvement with rock music declines as he reaches adulthood".

3.3 Low and high involvement

The easiest division of involvement is into **low vs. high involvement**. As was said, a typical feature of involvement studies is that researchers apply their own nuances to the terminology according to their approach. Some characteristics are agreed upon: highly involved consumers engage in more complex purchase decision making (Houston & Rothschild 1978) and are more brand loyal (Jacoby 1971, see Bloch 1981) than low-involved consumers. A clearly behavioral conceptualization, Richins and Bloch (1991, see Olsen 2007) found that consumers with high product involvement showed higher satisfaction with their cars than low-involved consumers over ownership.

A coarse classification of high and low involving products is: convenience and preference products produce low involvement, and shopping and specialty products produce high in involvement. In one study of 15 different product classes, cars portrayed the highest involvement and salt the lowest one (Park et. al. 1984, see Murphy & Enis 1986). This classification links involvement to perceived risk. Janssen & Jager (2001) remind that prices (a typical embodiment of risk) alone are not, however, responsible for demand fluctuations, and that social and psychological factors are also noteworthy ones.

Laurent & Kapferer (1985) criticize the division into merely high and low involvement, and instead, present a 10-point scale of involvement consisting of various levels from minimal involvement (corresponding 'low involvement') to total involvement (corresponding 'high involvement').

According to this classic study, **involvement can stem from five antecedents:**

- *Interest*: centrality, ego-importance of the product class
- *Pleasure*: hedonic and rewarding value of the product class
- *Sign*: perceived sign value of the product class
- *Risk importance*: perceived importance of the negative consequences of a mispurchase
- *Risk probability*: subjective probability of making a mispurchase

Thus, involvement can be viewed as an arousal state triggered by one or a combination of these antecedents. The triggered effect can be either situational or enduring involvement. A typical difference is an interest in wine, which leads to enduring involvement and a general disinterest in wine, which still can lead to a situational involvement when receiving guests. Examples of highly involving goods are perfume and dresses – these specialty products both score highly on the sign value and pleasure value scales. (Laurent & Kapferer 1985) Some later research (e.g. Havitz & Howard 1995, Havitz & Mannell 2005) has summed up the first two variables – interest and pleasure – for all-around *attraction*. It is useful to reclassify dimensions to be more suitable for the object of research at hand. Havitz and associates examined involvement in a leisure context where the combined attraction facet seemed to be the dominant one, where as risk facets have been more relevant in non-leisure contexts.

Laurent & Kapferer's 10-point scaling system (Consumer Involvement Profile) has been reproached for too complex for a practical level (e.g. Knox & Walker 2003). Nevertheless, many agree that the simple dualism of high and low does not give justice to the concept of involvement. While the metrification of results is under discussion and deemed complicated in literature, the manners of inspection are similar across studies: tracking the time spent on searching for a suitable product, on the number of brands considered, the energy spent, and the attention spent on each product category. (Engel & Blackwell 1982, see Laurent & Kapferer 1985)

3.4 Situational and enduring involvement

A dualism in many cases more suitable (and more discussed) for inspecting consumer conduct is **situational vs. enduring involvement**, defined as:

Situational involvement (SI): a temporary heightened feeling of involvement that accompanies a particular situation. (Havitz & Mannell 2005) E.g. influenced by product attributes such as cost, complexity, uniqueness and social value. Thus, situational involvement appears to result from perceived risk (Bloch & Richins 1983).

Enduring involvement (EI): an ongoing personal concern with a product which the individual brings into the purchase situation. This is a function of past experience with the product and the strength of values to which the product is relevant. (Bloch & Richins 1983)

Situational and enduring involvements are to some extent overlapping concepts. SI can be regarded as a glimpse of EI – it is the current and immediate feeling of EI as impacted by specific circumstances, and therefore not static. Havitz & Mannell (2005) give an example of a golfer with a relatively stable EI, who experiences a multiple thrust of SI during a charity golf event because of his EI with charity. SI is also influenced by many situational variables – here for example weather, playing partners, equipment and visibility.

Another concept added to the situational vs. enduring model is **flow**. Havitz & Mannell (2005) discuss the connection of the three. The concept of flow is often discussed in a leisure context, and is associated to a feeling of a “rush”. Flow has been seen as a triggering mediator between enduring and situational involvement. (Havitz & Mannell 2005) The level of involvement experienced by consumers is a function of the base level of enduring involvement (low to moderate for most products) plus the level of situational involvement caused by the physical and social context in the immediate situation. (Celsi and Olson 1988, Richins et al. 1992)

In sum, low involvement and high involvement both can be triggered by a strong situational factor – the latter combination resulting in flow.

3.5 Situational variables

Quester & Smart (1998) examined the influence of consumption situation and product involvement over product attributes. Situational influences are very relevant in any consumer study. Belk (1975) argues that explicitly recognizing situational variables can substantially enhance the ability to explain and understand consumer behavioral acts. However, an obstacle in the field of study is said to be the lack of a sufficient conception of the variables which make up a "situation". The researcher can never be sure that a complete array of possible situations is present. (Quester & Smart 1998)

Belk 1975 says that a situation comprises of a point in time and space and defined **five situational variables in marketing**:

1. Antecedent states
2. Task definition
3. Physical surroundings
4. Temporal perspectives
5. Social surroundings

Linking this back to the involvement discourse, situations clearly act as the triggers of involvement. The number of brands considered, depth of search, type of information sought and price limit all vary with consumption situation. People also use products and brands differently in different contexts. The situational influence gives us clues as to which attributes are meaningful. However, the links between involvement and situational variables has not been linearized. (Quester & Smart 1998) Situational influences have been said to illustrate how low importance products can be seen of high importance during a certain situation (Bloch & Richins 1983)

Many have made a distinction between purchase situation and the intended consumption situation, the first reflecting the variables operative during the actual purchase and the latter having an even greater effect on importance perceptions. (Belk 1975) For example, Simonson (1990) found that consumers who bought for earlier consumption made more restricted purchases than did consumers who bought for later consumption. (Roslow et al. 2000)

3.6 Ego involvement and purchase involvement

To add to the list of involvement terminology, the concept of **ego involvement** must be included to describe a more socio-psychological nuance, which is useful in the discipline of consumer behavior. The term dates back to the 1940's (Laurent & Kapferer 1985). Beatty et al. (1988) make a distinction between ego involvement and **purchase involvement**. Ego involvement is defined as personal interest to a product, while purchase involvement is a level of concern for the purchase process. Thus, the distinctions in classifying involvement have to do with linking the role of importance of either *a concrete product* and its attributes or the importance of *an act of doing*. Therefore, ego involvement can be regarded as synonymous with enduring involvement. Purchase involvement can be seen as more or less synonymous to situational involvement, but emphasizing one's identification with a decision or a brand choice (Laurent & Kapferer 1985). In everyday speech we speak of people who "live to ski" or who are "really into wine" when describing ego-involved individuals. Highly developed ego involvement can also have negative connotations, such as "addicted to fitness". (Rothschild 1984)

Beatty et al. (1988) clarify the distinctions:

Ego involvement: *"The brands that I consume say a lot about me."*

Purchase involvement: *"I care a lot about which brands I purchase."*

In comparison, brand commitment then refers to a certain brand which the consumer chooses regardless of the situation, as involvement does not directly lead to brand commitment.

High ego involvement is characterized by high product interest, which is not always purchase-orientated: for example, reading magazines, window shopping, attending fairs and following auctions. (Mascarenhas 2004) Celsi and Olson (1988) also remind that ego involvement is not always linked to intense participation. For instance, a ski buff cannot always ski as much as he wanted. Ego involvement is more about high identification: it is linked to the enthusiast role, and therefore the related equipment becomes instrumental role-related goods.

3.7 Brand loyalty and involvement

Moving on with different variables affecting consumers' purchase and consumption modalities, brand loyalty and involvement are concepts often linked in literature. When modified to purchase behavior, **habitual buying** is sometimes confused with brand loyalty. While habitual buying simply means repurchasing the same brand in any equal-length period of time (Ehrensberg 1988, in Knox & Walker 2003), brand loyalty, on the other hand, is a far more complex process. It manifests both psychological elements (e.g. brand commitment) as well as behavioral patterns (purchasing sequences) (Dick & Basu 1994, in ref.).

One of the most accepted definitions of brand loyalty is: *Brand loyalty is the nonrandom behavioral response expressed over time by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological evaluative processes.* (Jacoby 1971, see Bloch 1981

The brand level of decision making usually arises in studies of satisfaction and loyalty whereas involvement literature is chiefly defined on the product category level. Olsen (2007) recognizes a gap in the discussion: the role of product category involvement and satisfaction in the formation of repurchase loyalty toward a product category. The assumption is that consumers move from categories to subcategories to brands in their consumption choices. Johnson (1989, see ref.) suggests that broad categories are represented, processed and evaluated based on basic needs, goals and abstract attributes – whereas brands are evaluated based on concrete attributes. This would imply that involvement in product categories is deeper, and competition between brands therefore should advance from examining how well a certain brand corresponds to the needs of its product class, and not purely within the context of the brand. (Olsen 2007)

The relative strengths between brand loyalty, brand commitment and involvement are heavily discussed in literature. Research suggests that consumers may be heavily involved in a product class without portraying brand loyalty or brand commitment. (Warrington & Shim 2000, see Olsen 2007) On the contrary, it has also been shown that brand commitment or loyalty may as

well be seen without any specific involvement in the product category on hand.
(ref.)

Either way, it is useful to examine both brand loyalty and involvement in the same context. As was mentioned, consumer case studies should be examined individually. In a study (Rosenbloom 2007) of men's ties, the following four classes were formulated to portray different classes of consumer involvement situations:

- *Complex decision making* (=traditional high involvement decision making)
- *Inertia* (=traditional low involvement situation)
- *Brand loyalty*
- *Limited decision making.*

This exemplifies that studies need not follow a certain heuristic of term usage (if such should exist), but rather reconcile concepts according to the study.

Knox & Walker (2003) state that there is always unpredictability to the manners in which brands are consumed, but it is through measuring involvement, brand commitment and subsequent brand purchasing patterns (habitual brand consumption) that insights can be developed, i.e. examining brand loyalty and involvement in order to gain an understanding.

Effort distinguishes shopping from specialty products, since the buyer is near completely brand loyal. The price-quality function is important in shopping goods and shoppers are very aware of these variables, whereas purchasers of specialty goods may be blind to some factors when brand loyalty and social motivators are key. (Murphy & Enis 1986)

In the case of preference products (goods created through branding and advertising), the marketer aims to build and maintain buyer brand loyalty. When preference products attributes do not differ significantly – as is the case with a great proportion – brand building is key. Brand building should also be aimed towards retailers on top of consumers, because brand loyalty can easily be situational. (Murphy & Enis 1986)

The classic approach (e.g. Brenner 1999, see Janssen & Jager 2001) to habitual buying says that easily re-bought goods are chosen non-cognitively, i.e. by reinforcement learning. Consumers do not always automate behavior, but instead, switch between various cognitive strategies. Traditionally economists view consumer preferences as non-changing. More recent studies, however, portray that determinants of consumer preference lie strongly in both the social setting of consumption and the product itself. One reason to why consumers repeatedly purchase a specific brand in a category is that repeat purchase involves less effort and simplifies the decision making process.

Leclerc and Little (1997, see Quester & Lim 2003) phrase that repeat purchase for a high involvement product signifies brand loyalty whereas repeat purchase for a low involvement product signifies merely habitual buying. Rundle-Thiele & Bennet (2001) state that habitual behavior is typically the outcome of low involvement in the product purchase. The initial purchase may be significant and highly involving, but subsequent purchases lack this and become habitual and imply that there is limited decision making involved in the purchasing process. This is why in the consumer good market brand promotions are essential in maintaining confidence in the brand, and to secure the habitual buying patterns. Opposingly, high involvement goods and high risk product categories require more emphasis on service elements since more direct contact with the customers exists. It is implied that marketing communications must be enhanced because consumer good brand-loyals are only "fair-weather friends". (ref.)

It has been found that in a leisure activity context involvement and attitudinal loyalty correlate strongly (Park 1996, see Quester & Lim 2003). This is however under argument, as Iwasaki and Havitz (1998, see ref.) presented, saying that rather than a precondition to loyalty, involvement is linked to loyalty via sequential psychological processes.

Rundle-Thiele & Bennet (2001) remind that we link repeat purchase, customer satisfaction, brand equity and other measures to loyalty because it is tricky to identify a specific measurement of loyalty itself. As can be seen, views on the correlations between involvement, brand loyalty and habitual buying are not unilinear and it is encouraged that case studies are examined individually.

3.8 Chapter summary

The table below sums up the most relevant points of this chapter:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumers view products to be differently important.• Involvement is an internal state between perceptions of importance and action.• The concept of involvement is important in consumer behavior studies.• Involvement is often approached with dualisms, of which the most useful and common ones are high vs. low, situational vs. enduring, and ego vs. purchase involvement.• The terminology regarding involvement is often overlapping and turgid.• A consumer's involvement levels are not static.• Involvement is triggered by different antecedents and situational variables.• Measuring and quantifying of involvement is challenging.• Brand loyalty, involvement and habitual are often studied together, but do not necessarily correlate.• Studies regarding involvement should be case-specific.

Table 2: Consumer involvement

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of this study is not to provide a quick-fix solution on how to overcome the managerial challenges brought on by seasonal variations, nor to find exact mathematical congruencies on the effects of seasonality on a certain business. Instead, the aim is to better understand the phenomena of consuming products in a seasonal context – what kinds of consumption variables are the most relevant when discussing seasonal items, and as conclusions, think about which of these variables surface as the most relevant from a marketer's point of view. After inspection, a semi-structured, theme-based qualitative interview method was chosen to be the most efficient way to find experimental and behavioral data for this study.

In this chapter I start off by presenting a run-through of the theory – the theoretical framework comprising of the relevant themes surrounding the research issue, which aids in placing the empirical study within a field of academic discussion. Then I move on to describing the conduction of the empirical study and discuss different aspects of qualitative research in general, as well as using interviews as the source of data, describing the sample and methods used in this study, and examine precautions that a researcher must take into consideration both before, during and after data collection.

4.1 Theoretical framework

The preceding part of the study aimed to conceptualize the theoretical discussions regarding the subject of study. The theoretical framework is presented in figure 1 (page 33). Combining broad concepts together in a study is challenging, especially when the two primary discussions (seasonality and involvement) both have been encouraged to receive more academic attention separately. However, it arose during the initial research of the subject that this combination was a logical way to inspect the objectives of research. The role of the theory thus serves as a kick-off discussion for the different themes surrounding the empirical study.

The aim and challenge of this study is to grasp what variables affect the consumption of seasonal goods. In the previous two chapters the main discussion surrounding the research question and sub-questions were examined based on existing marketing literature – that of seasonality and that of involvement. As was discussed, the overall phenomenon is complex by nature. The concept of seasonality is a ubiquitous one in business: more or less every industry is affected by seasonal changes. (Roslow et al. 2000) Research on seasonality has been criticized for not being able to provide direct managerial implications (e.g. Reese 1995). The main problem can be derived to be that statistics are hard to combine with consistent knowledge on consumer conduct.

The discussion of consumer involvement is a theme omnipresent in consumer behavior studies. Although a concept well covered, involvement research has been criticized for being too theoretical. Rothschild (1984) noted that the majority of the work has lacked in real empirical findings. Laurent & Kapferer (1985) reason this as being due to two “plagues” in the involvement field: measuring and definition issues. Involvement has been measured by its consequences, but then again, one cannot test the consequences of a concept if already the concept itself is measured by these consequences. The second problem is the fragmented definition of involvement, as was seen in chapter 3. Rothschild (1984) stated that there is a lot of repetition in involvement studies and that the academic field has found it challenging to agree on definitions and directions where the discussion is heading or should be heading.

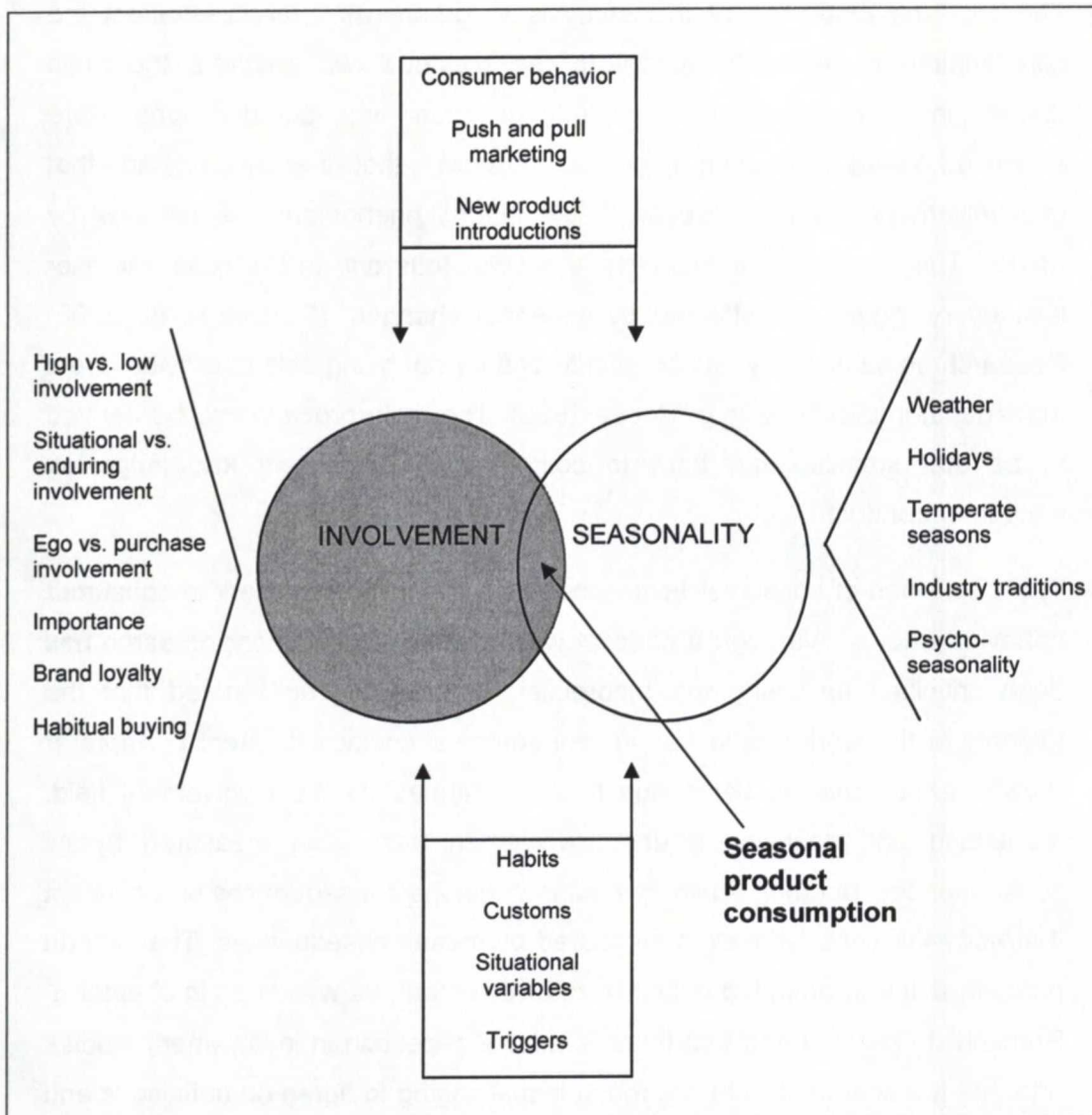


Figure 1: Framework of the consumption of seasonal products

The consumption practices of seasonal products in a behavioral context is in its specificity a subject which has no directly applicable previous research. The consumption of seasonal products has been inspected from mathematical, logistical, and economics-related angles, but the set-up has not moved to the consumer behavior field. Consumption practices of different products, on the other hand, have been inspected thoroughly. Involvement is a theme naturally applicable to consumer practices. Involvement studies help explain people's stable, continuing and situational consumer preferences, choices and participation to aid in planning, marketing and managing service delivery (Havitz & Mannell 2005). It has been noted that consumption is never an

independent act of doing, but always part of a social context (Olsen 2007). In the theoretical discussion, closely related themes to involvement were commitment, price–value relations and brand loyalty – and all of these were expected to arise in the empirical interviews, as well.

The focus of this study is to shed light on how seasonal products are consumed. From the above-presented framework it is more comprehensible to place this study amid an academic discussion palette and to piece together the entirety of this multi-faceted phenomenon.

4.2 Empirical method of the study

The objective of qualitative research is to inspect an object of study as in-depth as possible. It is shared knowledge that real-life problems are complex by nature, and therefore variables and occasions are overlapping and affect each other in complicated patterns. A **qualitative** study aims to represent and illustrate these complex relationships. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2001, 152)

When considering the relationship between qualitative research and theory, a question that easily arises is: “is theory necessary for a qualitative study?”. The answer is yes – the necessity is evident. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 17) One of the corner stones of qualitative research is that the empirical study is theoretical by nature: the contexts need to be bound to existing research for the inspection methods to be relevant. (ref. 19) Qualitative research needs to find a balance between a theoretical approach and subjective observations, and the observations are made and analyzed with theoretical implications and links in mind.

In this study, the **role of theory is guide-lining**: by inspecting previous research, it was possible to specify and direct the objectives of research. The primary logic used was an inductive one. According to Creswell (2003, 132) in inductive logic, a research question is formulated after which data is collected by testing questions relevant to the objectives. The results are then gathered by classifying them accordingly and seeking out common themes. In the end, the possible relations to other studies are discussed.

De Vaus (1991) and Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001) list that the review of literature and previous discussions aids in e.g.:

- Intensifying the objectives of the research by directing attention.
- Producing claims, explanations and predictions.
- Linking observations to larger scale phenomena.
- Organizing ideas and giving new ones to the researcher.
- Evidencing ways to combine seemingly unconnected problems.

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 12) state that contemporary scientific outlook is based on the view that people's behavior depends on the context. This defends the stand that to truly understand consumer motivations for conduct, a qualitative approach is more helpful compared to a quantitative one. In planning the objectives and themes of this study, it was also the primary wish to conduct narrative, loosely-structured interviews to gather data with which to inspect the research questions.

4.3 Data collection and the methods of analysis

An **interview is the primary method** in a qualitative research for acquiring information (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 192). The aim of this study being to find opinions, beliefs and conceptions on the motivations, reasons and patterns of consuming seasonal products, it seemed natural to have conversations with people that could supply interesting information. As was noted, no directly applicable academic research was found on the inspected themes, so any new information from the field was thought to be helpful in conceptualizing the research issues.

Different interview types can be identified: e.g. non-structured, semi-structured, theme-based, in-depth, formal, or qualitative interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001). The classification is made depending on the sturdiness of an interview outline – how loosely or specifically the questions are formulated, and how the interview situation is set up. The formal interview represents the strictest form

of the ones named, and the non-structured the loosest form. The method chosen for this study was the **semi-structured interview**, in order to inspect which themes the interviewees themselves thought to be relevant. The interview structure and manner of discussion, however, was kept quite similar for the commentary to be better comparable.

One of the most common questions regarding data collection (in both quantitative and qualitative research) is the **sample size**: how many interviews must be conducted for the study to be scientifically relevant. No specific amount can be given because studies can be conducted in many ways, and the depth of analysis of an individual interview can vary greatly. The objective of qualitative studies is not to provide statistically relevant information, but rather to gain more understanding of an interesting phenomenon. The interviewees should be chosen in a way to provide **as much knowledge as possible** on the subject. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 87) Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 181) state that interviews should be conducted until saturation is reached: i.e. when similar issues and viewpoints start to arise from the different interviews.

Merton et al. (1956, see Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47) discuss the traits of a **focused interviewing method**, which was the basis for this study too:

1. The interviewees have experience of a situation, i.e. they are **able to produce relevant information**. In this study, the roles of the different interviewees were found to fulfill this prerequisite. In sum, the varying positions of the interviewees together represent a wide scope of expertise relevant to the study.
2. The researcher must investigate the structures of the phenomenon under study and thus be able to come to certain conclusions and assumptions. Also, **careful analysis of the situation and the content** must be practiced in order to understand the mind-set of the interviewees.
3. Based on the mentioned, the researcher can **formulate an interview structure**.

4. The researcher can now direct the interview(s) towards the **subjective experiences** of the interviewees, and to gain relevant data from them.

To obtain as much insight as possible to the subject, it was chosen that the interviews in this study were conducted on **individuals with more perspective than product consumers**. The initial idea was to organize consumer panels where the interactive discussion would have sharpened reasons for different behavioral motivations and constructs. However, due to the lack of previous information on the narrow research question, it was after consideration decided to interview observers in the two industries represented (the beer industry and the skiing industry). It was quickly noted that these observer-types could provide a mix of consumer observations, views on different roles of the products and industry heuristics, but on a larger scope than individual consumers, who could mostly only speak for themselves. The interviewees' role also served as a dual one due to the fact that all were also consumers themselves of the products discussed, so they could relate to consumer-derived motivations, as well as observe variables in other consumers. The **selection of the interviewees** ran smoothly: after the initial, start-off interviews with the case company representatives (one for each company, Sinebrychoff and Amer Sports), a rough list was made. Some interviewees also recommended each other, and even interviewees chosen by the researcher's own logic were in several cases acquaintances by chance: it became clear that key figures in both industries know each other, which also served as reassurance of the relevance of these sources of information. The final **amount of interviews conducted was 13** (two of which were initial interviews – which served to formulate the research questions.) All interviews lasted for about an hour and were conducted separately. One interview was conducted over the telephone (S2) as the interviewee was in another country. The initial interviews were conducted in June of 2007 and the rest in August and September.

The following table presents the interviewees:

Interviewee:	Company / organization:	Position:
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Part 1: Beer

B1	Sinebrychoff	Marketing director
B2	Sinebrychoff	Brand manager, Karhu
B3	The Finnish Grocery Trade Association	Managing director
B4	The Beer Society of Finland	Chairman
B5	Finnish Society for Alcohol and Drug Research	Researcher
B6	K-Citymarket Vuosaari	Manager

Part 2: Downhill skis

S1	Amer Sports	Vice president, supply chain development
S2	Atomic Skis, Austria	Director, sales and marketing
S3	Sport and Ski Expo Finland	Manager
S4	Skimbaaja magazine	Editor-in-chief
S5	Intersport Finland	Winter sports product manager
S6	University of Jyväskylä	Professor of Sport Sociology
S7	Stockmann department store, Helsinki	Manager, sports equipment

Table 3: The interviewees.

The guidelines presented were followed in the interviewing process of this study. All of the interviewees are experts in the industry they represent in the study and all have both a professional and a personal interest in the product categories, which was also a prerequisite for their participation. It was considered important for the interviewees also to **represent varying links to the industries**. Therefore, the views of the case companies (B1, B2, S1 and S2) were juxtaposed with the views of a hobby and leisure derived connection (B4, S3 and S4), a sociological viewpoint (B5 and S6), as well as the views of retailers (B6, S5 and S7) and officials controlling retail (B3). All in all, it was concluded that the sample managed to produce an interesting cross-section of actors surrounding the two product categories.

The first part of the study inspected the phenomenon of seasonal consumption from a theoretical point-of-view. The interview frame was based on the themes discussed in the first part. Alasuutari (1995, 11–12) says that the last part of a study – the analysis and interpretation of the collected data – comprises of two phases: the **purification of the observations** and “**solving the mystery**”. It is common for the two to occur simultaneously. Also in this study, it was not seen as reasonable to separate the two by force, although distinguishable. The most important in analyzing qualitative data is making sense of what the interviewees said, how they said it, how they made sense of the phenomena under inspection, and how their views compare within the group (e.g. Hirsjärvi et al. 2001).

Processing the qualitative findings includes analysis and synthesis. Analysis means specifying and classifying data, and through this dividing it into smaller, controllable parts. Synthesis refers to re-formulating the data back into a clear entity. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 143-144) In this study, the attempt of data analysis was to **find a perspective on the complicated issue** of consuming seasonal products from a dual-structure of inspecting two different product classes separately. The interview structures for the two case studies were more or less the same, although **product category specific questions** and issues were charted. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to facilitate the analysis process. The texts were then cross-examined and divided into themes, firstly within the case of either beer or downhill skis, and also on a mutual level. It was clear from the beginning that not all themes are relevant for

both studies. **Citations are used** in the analysis to enliven the presentation of the findings, but most of the citations are transformed and combined with meta-text into a **narrative storyline**, which better represents the tackled issues as a whole. It was also decided that the emphasis is on the storylines of the interviewees and the aim of the study could be fulfilled better without overloading the study with systematic tools such as charts and matrices.

4.4 Reliability and validity

The reliability of a study refers to the accuracy of measurements (Solatie 1997, 65), meaning the **ability to produce non-random results**. Validity refers to the ability of the study to **measure what it aims to measure** (Hirsjärvi et al. 2001, 213). However, using an interview as the research method places some precautions on the analysis. Holstein & Curium (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185) remind that **interviews are dynamic** and do not necessarily produce the exact same answers on another occasion – this is especially typical for less-structured interviews, which are more **situation-dependent**. However, it is also the **duty of the researcher** to keep in mind these conditions and attempt to filter out clearly situation-specific elements.

The reliability of the qualitative data was addressed by conducting **as many interviews as needed** to reach the desired level of saturation. The representativeness was pursued by interviewing people of different roles with different perspectives. All of the interviewees were considered experts in the field they represent. Consumer interviews could have been gathered, as well as specific sales data which could have been juxtaposed with the present interviews, but it was felt that the sample sufficed for the aims of this study. Any more data from interviews would have been difficult to control.

The interviews were conducted without a clear question sheet sent beforehand, even though this was the wish of some of the interviewees. The study was described shortly while contacting the interviewees. The aim of the interviews was to address the research topics through an **informal conversation**, with the attempt to find true narratives. An important part of the conduction of the interviews was also to speak to the interviewees in their own words, and

avoiding complicated marketing jargon with interviewees who were most likely not familiar with such.

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 189) mention that in qualitative research, more important than the quality of the gained data is the trustworthiness of the researcher and the conduct of the study. It is also important to note that an interview is always the shared result of the collaboration between the interviewer and the interviewees. The method of triangulation is often applicable to qualitative studies – i.e. comparing the gained data to other sources and finding unanimity it can then be considered reliable. However, triangulation is not completely suitable for this study as very little directly comparable has previously been collected. The reliability of the sources is, however, successful when it can be seen that the subjects can verify each other's status in a certain group. It was discussed with all the interviewees who the other interviewees in the study are and, as was noted, most knew each other personally or at least clearly understood their role in the study.

5. CONSUMING A SEASONAL PRODUCT: BEER

The previous chapters concentrated on formulating a theoretical framework for inspecting the consumption of products in a seasonal context. This chapter uncovers the first part of the findings based on the interviews with the first group, individuals dealing with the beer industry. The next chapter will unlock the second set of interviews, the observations from the downhill ski industry. The two case studies will first be examined separately, and then juxtaposed for further inspection in chapter 7.

In this chapter I will first discuss different takes on seasonality. As the interviewees represent different roles within the industry, a broader perspective can be gained and some interesting, possibly opposing views are inspected. Next, the traits of beer as a seasonal item, and beer consumption in a seasonal context are examined. The different roles that beer portrays to consumers and other actors arose as a complex field, which is uncovered next. The confrontational views regarding push and pull marketing are discussed in relation to the consumption patterns and modalities of beer. The challenges of the beer marketer with new product introductions and controlling the portfolio make up the next topic. Before moving on to inspecting the overlapping concepts of involvement and brand loyalty, the possibilities of stretching seasons and the push-marketing of new seasons are discussed. Finally, a look into teaching and learning of the consumer is given. After unfolding these aspects, a summary is presented.

5.1 Case study Sinebrychoff

Oy Sinebrychoff Ab is one of the oldest industrially operating breweries in the Nordic countries. The main products are the popular Finnish beers KOFF and Karhu. Also, a variety of foreign and specialty beers are represented. Sinebrychoff also produces limited availability Easter and Christmas brews. (Sinebrychoff 2008)

Beer is the world's oldest and most popular alcoholic beverage. Today, the brewing industry is a huge global business, with more than 133 billion liters sold annually. The industry consists of several dominant multinational companies and many thousands of smaller producers ranging from brewpubs to regional breweries. (Wikipedia 2008) According to Sinebrychoff, the most notable challenge is fierce competition in the industry, which accentuates the importance of desirable brand features (B1). Thus, the need to understand consumers is evident.

The wish of Sinebrychoff was to examine the phenomenon of seasonal demand changes. In the initial interview regarding the study, the marketing director of Sinebrychoff addressed several aspects of seasonality and beer consumption: the effects of weather and holidays, the challenging balancing of new product introductions, the impacts of fluctuations on production, supply chains and storage, as well as various features of beer consumption and the beverage industry in total. The collection of the actual group of interviewees was conducted with this talk in mind, with the aim to tackle the assignment in a versatile manner and to better understand the formulated research question: how are seasonal products consumed.

In this study, *beer* refers to the most common type sold and consumed in Finland: so-called class III lager beer (4,5–4,7 % alcohol per volume), if not otherwise noted.

5.2 Beer as a seasonal item

Beer is seen as an item clearly affected by seasonal and situational variables – this feature was accepted by all interviewees. The most notable effects on demand variation and consumer interest were perceived to be weather, holidays and celebrations, long weekends and the summer. All of the mentioned occasions experience clear peaks. Most variation was seen to be shared by other beverages and their consumption, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, saying that the trigger-action-chains in consumer conduct are more or less similar. However, because of the nature of beer, the magnitude of the effect is seen to be less. Beer is seen as a well-established product category

and this feature makes it prone to less forceful seasonal variation than other alcoholic beverages, for example cider or bottled long drinks (which are often considered substitutive products). It was mentioned that beer has a more or less stable consumer group throughout the year and that the consumption situations are well-established. It can be derived that beer has a strong baseline of interest compared to many beverages, on top of which seasonal occurrences then add their touch. The clearest seasonal correspondence was the link between sunny weather and beer consuming:

During the summer, the sun is the best salesman for beer. (B6)

The weather effect emphasizes the month of May, which in the industry is traditionally said to determine the whole summer demand. B1 noted that in the year 2006, unstable May weather had a significant effect on summer sales. The summer season also changes the consumption setting as restaurants and bars set up outdoor seating. B1 and B2 view that it would be easier business-wise if product demand patterns were more stable. Although the effects of weather and holidays are known, the magnitudes are often not numerically prefigurable. A wish of (beer) marketers is to be able to control sales patterns, but the hands-on means provide a challenge:

The total effect should somehow be less volatile. For example less demanded products could perhaps be bundled together so they would sell more during a lower season. The fluctuations between products should be as little as possible, so then the answer would be to try to affect the consumers – somehow. (...) We want to benefit to the maximum [from seasonality] but also smoothen its effects, so it's complicated. (B1)

The interviewees were chosen to represent different roles to broaden the discussion. Top-of-mind, the respondents mentioned different aspects to seasonality: the beer marketer was concerned with responding logistically to sudden demand changes, the brand manager first thought of new product introductions, the sociologist brought up the strong social traditions that affect consumption, and the beer enthusiast discussed seasonal specialties. As can be seen, seasonality is a fragmented theme and all of these aspects are interesting from a marketer's point of view.

An interesting notion that came up was that traditionally beer was not a summer drink, because brewing followed that harvest season. According to B4

many beer enthusiasts thus see the fall time as the "true" beer season. This goes to show that many accepted consumption patterns have merely been invented and then accustomed to at some point.

Beer consumption is all about traditions. Christmas and Easter are the biggest beer celebrations, beer goes with them. Of course, Oktoberfest is the most important beer festivity in fall. (B4)

In addition to Christmas and Easter, big beer occasions are Midsummer in the Nordic countries, as well as First of May – all national holidays. The brand manager (B2) said she is surprised by the strong connection of beer and Easter nowadays, saying that the link is quite recent. B6 described that national holidays are all developing strong consumption practices, especially with food and drink. The common denominator with the afore-mentioned is that all are established social gatherings, when families and friends come together to eat and drink. It was also noticed that the beer itself does not have to (and more often does not) portray self-evident links to the celebration at hand, but is more habitual.

It is not self-evident that beer must be drunk during Easter, but it has been more and more so, and breweries have come out with specialty Easter beers. (B2)

5.3 The different roles of beer

The multifaceted role of beer surfaced in all interviews. An all-round defining feature of beer consumption is that it links strongly to leisure and togetherness. As a volatile product it can easily be related to almost any festivity and occasion. More than an accompaniment to celebrations, it is also seen as a must-have for all social gatherings. The role of beer as an item of social consumption is evident, even axiomatic:

Beer is always there. If you're having friends over to help you move, they expect there to be beer. It would even be weird if there was some other drink there. (B5)

You can always say "I'll have a beer", when you can't decide. It goes with everything. People are just used to beer. (B3)

In their free-time, people just want to let loose and have a few beers: in the pub, at home with friends or after the sauna. Then it's about relaxing. (B4)

The insuperable trait of beer as an alcoholic drink is in many ways constraining: it strictly limits both the availability and consumption of it. However, the accentuation of beer first and foremost as an alcoholic product is not necessary, and many of the interviewees did not emphasize this. The role of beer is much more diverse than just an instrument to attain a state of intoxication. The alcohol aspect is, however, requisite when discussing beer consumption.

Beer has a very controversial role between an alcoholic drink and a grocery item. (B4)

As was mentioned, beer experiences heightened demand during the summer and during warm weather, which as contexts are linked to free-time and leisure. Judging from the interviews, the involvement perspective is challenged by thinking about substitutive products: instead of a beer on a summer day, a consumer may choose an ice-cream instead. A common way of thinking was derived: it is possible that it is primarily the leisure context that arouses involvement in consumers, instead of the product category or the brand.

Regarding product category roles, a common concern of all of the interviewees is the appreciation of beer. Regardless of the varying roles of beer – e.g. alcohol product, beverage, thirst-quencher, and meal chaser – the clear attempt of all manufacturers and marketers (as well as those with some other strong interest) is that their product is seen as a valuable one. The pricing of beer hinders this aim. Beer pricing in Finland has experienced major changes in the past few years (mainly due to the lowered tax on alcohol because of altered EU trade regulations) and retailers have used beer as a draw-in product for grocery shoppers. This has led to a situation described in the national media as a “price war on beer”. The interviewees all agreed that the down-pricing of beer is harmful to the product category. The down-pricing is clearly linked to the seasonality discussion in the sense that price cuts coincide with typical seasonal peaks such as holidays and weekends.

Beer has been caught up in the show-down of the big supermarket chains, who are competing on the lowest price for a 12-pack. (B1)

The general view of the interviewees is that cheap beer only benefits the mass consumer. B3 argued that beer does not even have the desired effect of a pull-in, as the consumers who buy large quantities at a time are *"young men, who don't spend much on groceries anyways"*. The discussion on beer prices is emotional: B3 would be willing to push governmental regulative actions to achieve a price-floor for beer to calm down undesired consumption. The beer marketers see the price play as extremely harmful:

The appreciation of beer should be lifted. "Cheap beer" is a nightmare situation, it eats away the brand value. (B2)

However, it was mentioned that wisely used price cuts can sometimes even be beneficial to the brand. B2 tells that Sinebrychoff sometimes extends a hand to the extremely brand loyal Karhu drinkers by putting out an offer – but only rarely as not to lessen the appreciation and value of the brand.

Both B4 and B5 divide beer consumers into two regarding the alcohol discussion: the quantity consumers and the quality consumers. Bluntly put, the first group wants to get drunk, is rarely brand loyal and is very price-sensitive. The second group has a lot of internal variation, but generally views beer as a product of value. Although representing the desired segments as a whole, the second group is also problematic in many ways. Multiple roles might be conflicting, as overlapping and even opposing features are wanted simultaneously. All interviewees wanted to emphasize the connection of beer and food, saying that building a wine-like imagery of indulgence, and beer as a mealtime accompaniment would help break the undesired link of binge-drinking. Then again, most interviewees also discussed another role for beer: a more beverage-like, stable, everyday consumption item – a grocery item, in other words. The alcohol-role of beer is not something to be eliminated either – as was said, beer is sold by the mass with festivities and the link of alcohol and celebration is obvious. Another role that was promoted was beer as a reward-item, for example after a hard day's work. Then again, this type of image somewhat contradicts the afore-mentioned. In sum, the maintaining, enhancing and balancing of these multiple roles were seen as a challenge. It was seen that beer consumers are a hard group to teach, and that old habits are hard to kick:

The corner stores and markets would also want to emphasize the role of beer as a social drink and a meal chaser. But I don't think it is so in most households. If you eat dinner at 6 PM, then it is not yet considered the time to have a beer. [The consumption practices are] all about attitudes. And traditions and customs. (B3)

The social stigmas plaguing beer came up in almost all interviews. B4 mentioned that not too long ago buying beer at the store used to be like buying condoms or tampons: shameful or uneasy. The store-owner (B6) links the stigmatic aspect also to the purchase occasion:

Some people think that other people think that you're a drunk if you buy a lot of beer on, say, a Tuesday morning, even though you're just cutting the queues of the end of the week. (...) But, if you buy a load of beer just before Midsummer, it's ok because people know it's for that. (B6)

5.4 Push and pull marketing

A confrontation that arose in the interviews is whether seasonal marketing practices a push or pull approach. In other words, whether consumers learn to demand products at a certain time, or whether they adopt and adapt to what is pushed to them. It was already noted that many traditions and habits are grown into. B3 viewed that the two variables most affecting the consumption of beer are supply and price – in other words, a push approach.

Celebrations like the First of May or a long weekend rely on a single day or two, where as the Christmas time, Easter and the summer go on for longer in the consumer's mind and habits. The problem with holiday-related items such as an Easter beer is that the season ends on a given date, after which supply is withdrawn. The balancing is tricky: the interviewees have all observed that consumers readily try out and grow fond of seasonal items and even look forward to them early on. Even over-anticipation occurs: B6 tells that, for example, grocery shoppers request typical Easter food delicacies as early as January–February. The limitation is that a season can be extended in anticipation, but not by extending the sale time after the holiday. This was seen as the problem with clearly seasonal specialty beers: the enthusiasts wait for them and wish that they were available for a longer time, but then again

stretching the availability would take away the quaintness. Also, it is seen that some consumers might even become annoyed with over-enthusiastic marketing efforts – for example, promoting Christmas items as early as All Saint's Day.

The interviewees subscribed to the idea of holiday celebrations having strict patterns of consumption. According to B2, First of May celebrations include consuming beer, sparkling wine and other alcohol products – so the job of the marketer is to offer these easily. Within the constraints, adjustments can be made, for example teaching the consumers that a 24-pack of canned beer is handy for the summer house and in this sense, pushing works well. However, in many cases people working in the industry do not look for reasons, and accept the habitual patterns. As seasonal consumption patterns are accepted to relate strictly to the season at hand, marketers assent to a pull strategy:

Different products have their own seasons, and we're not trying to change that as such. For example, Sprite is a big hit for New Year's Eve, and Coke for Christmas. We just do what is expected for a certain season and offer the drinks that people want. (B2)

On the contrary, the birth of traditions is an expression of push-orientated marketing, and it was viewed as something that the industry engages in:

If there is no natural demand, then we just have to push [the demand]. For example, October is slower so maybe we could create something with [the annual German harvest season beer festival] Oktoberfest. (B1)

All in all, it can be derived that the causes and effects can easily become blurred, as it is not always clearly known if the consumers act according to the marketers' logic, or if the marketers act according to the consumers' logic.

5.5 Controlling the product portfolio

Introducing new products to the market is an essential feature of the quickly-changing and heavily competed beverage industry. As was discussed in both the review of literature and in this chapter, industry traditions play a big role in the commercialization of seasonal goods. The beer brand manager (B2) regards seasons mainly as related to the launching rhythms of new products.

The role of the habit is accepted, even though other possibilities might be under consideration. Adding to the dichotomy of marketers and consumers, the retail side of the industry has also formulated its own patterns, which complicates further the source of demand a certain demand. B2 mentions that the launching tradition comes from the daily consumer side, not from beer marketers. The seasonal launch pattern is acute:

Totally new products are always launched in either April or September, with April being the biggest window. September and January see smaller launches. So we basically go by these. Then there are the strictly seasonal items, such as Christmas beer, which is launched in November. (B2)

The producers also feel the need to control total variation, and it is customary to make room by pulling out an item before launching a new one. This way the palette also stays fresh. The marketing view to seasonal launch restrictions is somewhat dual: they are seen to ease out in controlling the total functions, but also as taking the edge off of creative marketing efforts, which could excite the consumer and enhance demand.

We are getting more and more restrictions. In a way it would be fun for us at marketing if we could do whatever we wanted at any given time, but I get the point in the logic, too. (B2)

B1 reminds that the market has always acted along the same pattern, so nobody is on a mission for radical changes, even though some aspects might be worth challenging. The frame is not without questions even to experts with many years behind them in the field:

For the past 15 years or so, the consumer market has worked in a tri-seasonal pattern: products are launched every four months. It could and should be challenged, but then again, it is maybe easier this way as it means a lot of work for a lot of people. But on the other hand, it would smoothen demand and lessen the seasonal effect, which would be a good thing. Then again, how wise is it to force the industry like this? I worked on the daily consumer side before and I think the workload caused by the seasonal peaks should be smoothened. (B1)

The time frames for new product introductions are large. For example, an April launch must be notified to the grocery trade already in the fall. It is accepted that if a launch is prolonged for some reason (usually missing out on the launch window due to delays in production or marketing), it is moved up to the next possible launch window, e.g. from April to September. Season-inspired

products, such as a summery beer brew, or a springtime cider can be postponed by a full calendar year if the launch window is missed. B2 tells that Sinebrychoff have many ready product concepts in store awaiting an optimal launch occasion.

It was mentioned that industry traditions live strong. The market leader creates the logic within the industry. The simultaneity is both an advantage and harm: competition triggers and activates consumption as a whole, but there is a risk of losing share-of-voice in the mass. This way, the role of the market leader is somewhat circular:

When the new launching window kicks in, everyone is out with their new products and wants to shout out at the same time. (...) We still have to do our best to max out the season, and this means being awake and shouting where and when the others are shouting. The market leader acts along the logic of the industry and the smaller players attempt to pull off something different [because they cannot compete with the mass advertising and other marketing communications]. (B1)

The market leader thus acts as both a pioneer (by telling others when and where to advertise) and a laggard (by being bound to a certain marketing communications strategy). The market leader has to constantly have the upper hand on all seasons and peaks, therefore reinforcing their role further. Thus, the vicious circle of seasonal marketing has been formed.

Different departments may feel differently to keeping up with seasonal variation. From a logistical point of view, balancing between trends, changing likes and the whole seasonal palette is tricky. B2 stated that the cooperation between different departments does not always run smoothly, due to information gaps. The role of marketing according to B2 is to try to "*meet the others half-way*" and balance out new product introductions.

The people dealing with prognostics and logistics probably think that the majority of our products should be terminated. But their viewpoint is different [than that of the marketing department]. All of the gazillion different packages and thingies are an essential competitive weapon, so it is worth the loss in logistical efficiency. We want to be an interesting beverage house, even though logistics think we are just messing around. It's about balancing. We try to do our best at marketing to keep some kind of balance. (B2)

I'm also thinking whether it would be possible to control the total portfolio [consisting of beer, cider, long drinks, alcohol-free

beverages and energy drinks] by a share-of-throat thinking. It is in a way an aim to find drink categories that complement each other. Then again, it is maybe better to concentrate on what we do best and not try to conquer all categories. (B1)

In sum, controlling the portfolio is challenging in relation to the many parties involved: logistics, marketing, retail, consumers as well as competing internal ways of thinking inside the company.

5.6 Creating new seasons

A way to enhance sales and develop the seasonal pattern could be filling out the gaps between the top peaks. B1, B2 and B4 noted that the months between the holiday season of November–December and Easter form a quieter phase in beer consumption. An interesting seasonal tradition is the typically Finnish “Dropless January”, a time when many refrain from alcohol consumption, to the point of beer marketers choosing not to launch new major alcoholic beverages during the first month of the year. Another opening in the seasonal beer calendar is on the other side of the holiday season – between summer and October’s Oktoberfest, when beer is topical again. Returning to the issue of push vs. pull marketing, the marketer has a lengthy history in associating certain consumption to certain situations or occasions. To fill in the gap by stretching existing and established (already highly consumerized) seasons was perceived to be risky, so finding new links could be an option worth considering.

Historically, it is the marketing machinery that has successfully linked holidays and traditions with consumption patterns, forming links that now seem totally natural. For example, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day nowadays hold rite-like consumption habits. A classic example of consumerizing a re-discovered tradition is Valentine’s Day: companies such as the greeting card powerhouse Hallmark have done their best to boost what is now an annual multi-million greeting card, flower and confectionary celebration. (Smith 1995)

According to the interviewees, the creation of new seasons is seen as a somewhat good idea. All of the interviewees want to see beer as a versatile

consumption product and all seem more or less excited about finding new connections – as long as the link is justified:

We don't feel to need to make every holiday a beer drinking celebration. But a fresh cider type around Valentine's Day or a spring beer might work. (B2)

It was noted that seasons, holidays and celebrations do not always have to come from abroad (such as St. Patrick's Day, Halloween and Valentine's Day), and that national heritage could well be integrated into beer consuming, which could help make it even more identifiable to consumers:

I would want to dig up old traditions like [the ancient Finnish harvest festival] Kekri and see a brew related to that. (B4)

A way to promote new seasonal products could be in-store efforts, as the majority of beer is purchased in supermarkets. The retail side has noticed that seasonal products are typically bundled by the consumers themselves: for example, beer as a part of "the Christmas items" or "the Midsummer items". A possible slot for new seasons and to promote a seasonal beer is to place it rigidly within a bundled consumption context:

A special beer for the crayfish season [in August] would be a good idea as it's become quite a big thing nowadays consuming-wise, and also lasts almost the whole month. It could be placed next to the toast and the red napkins and other crayfish party things that people buy [in the supermarket]. (B6)

An easier way than a totally new brew is to seasonalize consumption by product enhancement: seasonal promotions can be customizing the package, can or bottle to coincide with a certain date, holiday or longer season. Cosmetic enhancements are common for both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Thematic labels for Halloween, Christmas, summer and other seasons are already commonly used. Also, an example is the special edition 0.5 liter beer can to celebrate the Art Goes Kapakka summertime city festival that Sinebrychoff released in 2007. This form of seasonal product enhancement was said to be useful for sponsorship relations.

5.7 Beer, involvement and brands

Involvement in beer is linked to many variables: brand loyalty, product category interest, and social consumption, among others. According to the interviewees, beverages in general are prone to awaken a strong consumer interest. Branding is essential, and many consumers swear by a certain brand of beer, energy drink or soda. Both involvement and brand loyalty are important in beer consumption, and mental images run strong:

Mental images and associations are really important. Everyone swears by a certain brand, or at least has a beer brand that they can't stand. Funny enough, then in tastings, people hardly ever recognize their own beer. (B4)

An interesting phenomenon in Finland with linking brand loyalty to social consumption is so-called geographical brand loyalty: beer consumers in the Pori area prefer Karhu beer, and in the Turku area Aura beer, because of the strong associated links between the brands and these areas. Furthermore on the social side, another strong brand loyalty link mentioned by several interviewees was that of ice-hockey sponsorship by beer brewers. It was also seen that brand loyalty differs significantly between brands even from the same manufacturer and marketer:

Our Karhu drinkers are much more loyal than KOFF drinkers, they won't accept any other brand. (...) Karhu drinkers can do crazy things, like get a tattoo of the logo. (B2)

According to B1 and B2, beer in general is more brand-involving than cider, the usual comparison product. Cider drinkers are committed to the product category as a whole, whereas beer drinkers are committed to a certain brand. Then again, opposing views were also found: B6 views that because beer is developing as a product category, it is nowadays more involving through the product class than the brand.

We [at a large Helsinki supermarket] now have a lot of customers who look after novelties, not just price or just any kind of lager beer. And they look for the novelties regardless of the brand. Beer interests already by itself. (B6)

The difference in views can possibly be deduced to relate to beer drinker segments: while the big masses go after brands, the more advanced consumers get involved with the product category. B5 says that beer can be a

tool for constructing identity, therefore arousing involvement. Also, involvement can be silently evolving "*because of the strong cultural and social associations*". B4 felt that specialty beers, imports and seasonal beers are also used as a way of differentiation, to exclude oneself from the masses.

It was mentioned that brand loyalty can diminish with the seasonality effect, meaning that consumers are more price-sensitive than brand-sensitive when purchasing a larger amount at a time, for example to take to the summer house or for holiday celebrations. The role of convenience is uplifted when many other things are on the mind.

If you're driving to the summer house and you stop by at a store, you're going to buy the brand of 6-pack that they have. (B5)

As for involvement and its sources and projections, B4 viewed that trying out specialties and other hobby-type consumption derives from two sources: a thirst for information, and a social togetherness – portraying the concept of high or enduring involvement. Specialty products in the beer industry can be divided into two groups: seasonal, limited availability beers and marginal, always available (although through limited distribution location-wise) products, such as small brewery specialties, darker brews, or other beers with a defining attribute. Different beers were seen as both curiosity items, even collectibles in the sense that beer lovers want to try out as many different beers as possible, and give a warm welcome to novelty items. Among interesting items, the interviewees mentioned Fair Trade beer, fruit-flavored beer and brews from small breweries. The seasonal products are planned along their "suitability". B2 says that in the fall season consumers seek out fuller flavors, and in the spring something more "sparkling". B4 mentions that "summer beer drinkers" look after the "cooling effect", where as during the colder months, something flavorsome with a higher alcohol content. B6 explains that Easter and Christmas beers are darker brews, which goes together with the related, heavy foods.

Involvement in the beer category can be displayed quite effortlessly and impulsive point-of-purchase buys are common.

We have the Fair Trade beer out really visibly, and people try them out. I guess the shop environment plays a big part, it invites to try things. Most people don't go around shops and look for the Fair

beer or the Easter beer, they just buy it if they happen to see it.
(B6)

The arguments on beer involvement can be linked to pleasing the masses as well. Special, limited edition or seasonal beers were not seen to arouse only marginal interest on highly involved consumers, but something for everyone.

For the "basic" consumer, I guess they settle for the offering of the bigger breweries because they are more conveniently available. Maybe it's also easier to try out small brews from the bigger breweries because of the [recommendation role of] brand. (...) Us beer fanatics, we await new seasonal products and special brews like birdwatchers do with birds – if there's a sighting, everyone runs there, because the products always have limited availability. (B4)

It was guessed by B4, the beer fanatic, that new product introductions have the role of injecting new interest in beer for all consumers, therefore benefitting the whole industry.

Specialty beers are often purchased in a small quantity on top of regular [lager] beer. As opposed to the supply and price variables affecting regular beers, specialty beers are primarily affected by supply – consumers will try out what they see at the point of purchase. Some pull-effects occur nevertheless as highly involved customers request certain product types. (B6)

It is natural that specialty beers, import brews and seasonal items are priced higher than standard lager, which serves as a quality cue and emphasizes the indulgence role of the product.

5.8 Teaching the consumer

An important task of marketers is to understand consumer behavior and try to guide it according to the needs of the company. The theme of traditions and restrictions seemed, as mentioned, an omnipresent view with all the interviewees, even

The consumer is constantly taught different things. Sometimes they learn, sometimes they don't. For example, we would like that the rate of purchasing would be bigger amounts at a time, so beer would be a more household type item – like soda or cheese. You don't have to eat the whole pack of cheese in one go, either. (B2)

The industry has been at times successful in the teaching and learning process. In the 1990's the majority of beer was sold in single bottles, then around the year 2000 6-packs took over, then the 12-pack – which became a huge hit after receiving a lot of media attention. Now (in 2007) the 24-pack has become the staple size in grocery markets. It is, of course, under discussion whether the consumer is actually altering its willingness – or just accepting and adjusting to the rules laid forth by the marketer. B2 says that adjusting package sizes plays its part in altering the role of the product to the desired direction: to make it more common and a natural part of the everyday life.

Some sort of learning curve can be observed from the responses of the interviewees, but not all support this. B2 mentions that for example in cola drinks, there is a clearly observable learning curve from sugar versions to light versions. It was unclear whether some sort of learning curve exists for beer: possibly from the common lager to specialized marginal products.

The links between different beer types should be emphasized and this would raise the general appreciation of beer. It would probably come first from foreign beer, and move on to domestic ones. So it's exotic somehow – that is how [the learning process] is with all products. And after that the domestic industry can also benefit from it. (B3)

Affecting consumer behavior practices was also seen as a task too difficult in many parts:

Consumer trends and habits change so quickly that it's impossible to keep up to be able to affect them on time. (B3)

5.9 Summary of the first case study

The following table sums up the primary findings of the first case study, highlighting the logic of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4.1:

1. Seasonality clearly affects beer consumption, although the measuring of the impact is challenging:

- Beer is seen as a product category clearly affected by seasonal variation and occurrences.
- The most pre-eminent seasonal effects on beer consumption are weather conditions, holidays and celebrations and the summer. These all arouse interest in the product category and portray clear peaks of heightened demand.
- The weather effect emphasizes the month of May, which is said to determine summer demand.
- The magnitudes directly caused by seasonal demand variations are not easily determinable.
- Seasonality is a fragmented theme and different people dealing with the beer industry have different views on seasonality, stressing different features as the primary portrayal of the phenomenon.

2. Involvement in beer is often involvement in social intercourse and leisure:

- Traditions and habits play a significant role in both consumption and commercialization. The seasonal effect binds beer to holidays, celebrations and free time.
- A dominating, even axiomatic trait of beer consumption is the social aspect of the consumption of it. The object of involvement is not the actual product, but the related context.
- Involvement, convenience and brand loyalty are often overlapping and hard to distinguish, and thus worth inspecting together. Heuristics are hard to come by and different parties have different views on the emphases.
- Geographical brand loyalty to beer is a typical Finnish feature. Another important brand link is ice-hockey sponsoring. These both arouse involvement through another interest than the product category, and work as situational triggers.

3. The role of beer is volatile and roles can overlap, leading to challenges on the marketer's side. Consumers are nevertheless volatile themselves, and accepting towards new product introductions and seasonal products. A concern in the industry is the appreciation of the product category, mainly in relation with pricing:

- The role of beer is diverse: it is viewed as e.g. an alcoholic drink, a mealtime drink, an indulgence item, a grocery product and a thirst-quencher. Multiple roles often overlap and the confliction can hinder the marketers' aim to approach the beer consumer. Then again, the volatile role is accepted and fostered.
- Beer is seen as a well-established and mature product category, which makes it less prone to demand variation than many other alcoholic beverages.
- The alcohol aspect is requisite when discussing beer consumption. The social stigmas related to alcohol are evident in consumption and purchasing.
- The teaching of beer consumers is seen as challenging on the industry's part due to the strong habitual and tradition-derived behavior.
- A common concern in the industry is the appreciation of beer. Down-pricing is seen as harmful to individual brands as well as the whole product category.
- A common wish is to emphasize the connection between food and beer, even to transform beer more towards a wine-like indulgence product. At the same time another desired role as a staple, everyday consumer good is pushed.
- The balancing of seasonal marketing is challenging: Stretching seasons with over-anticipating marketing efforts can be frowned upon. Then again, consumers eagerly await seasonal specialties and inquire about them early on.
- The creation of new seasons is a possibility for the beer marketer, although the link has to be justified. Marketers have a strong history of linking consumption patterns to seasonal occasions.
- Traditions do not always have to be adopted from abroad (e.g. St. Patrick's Day), as national heritage (e.g. Kekri) could just as well be exploited, perhaps even more justifiably.
- Seasonal products are typically bundled by consumers and holiday food and drink items are seen as an entity, giving the retailer and marketer cues on marketing.

- Easier done than a full novelty introduction, cosmetic enhancements like seasonally themed bottle labels are considered good ways to incorporate seasonal links.
- The existence of a learning curve with beer consumption is under question (e.g. moving up from staple lager to specialty brews).

4. The push vs. pull effect is unclear as consumers, marketers and retailers simultaneously guide the market and accept modalities from each other:

- Retailers push their own constraints onto the industry, which limits the marketer's freedom and guides the consumers' conduct.
- It is not always clear whether the consumers act according to the marketer's logic or vice versa, e.g. with timing product introductions, as well as with purchasing and consumption occasions in relation to habits and customs.
- The marketers accept the constraints and habitual patterns, although they view that they could be challenged.
- The market leader creates the logic within the industry regarding marketing channels and efforts, and acts both as a pioneer and a laggard.
- Contradicting views inside the company also complicate the seasonal pattern: e.g. between logistics and marketing.

Table 4: Consuming beer as a seasonal product

6. CONSUMING A SEASONAL PRODUCT: DOWNHILL SKIS

In this chapter I will discuss the second part of the empirical research: the case study regarding the downhill ski industry. After presenting the foundational idea of the second case study, I will address the theme of skiing and seasonality based on the different views of the experts interviewed. Industry patterns and modalities are examined, as well as the correlation of these with marketing and consumption. After this, involvement in the skiing context is examined through views on consumer conduct and motivations. Although strongly linked to involvement, brand loyalty is inspected separately. Then, skiers as consumers are examined through the variables affecting consumption manners. Finally an important topic that arose strongly in the interviews is tackled: the challenging link of prices, purchasing and the value of the product. Finally, a brief look is taken at bundling and product enhancement as sales incentives. After unfolding these aspects, a summary is presented.

6.1 Case study Amer Sports

Amer Sports Oyj is the world's leading sports equipment company, providing equipment, technical apparel and footwear for a wide variety of athletic activities behind brands such as Salomon, Atomic, Wilson, Suunto and Precor. This study is concerned with the winter sports category of Amer, more specifically downhill skiing, which are represented by the Salomon winter sports equipment and Atomic brands. (Amer 2008)

Downhill skiing is one the world's most popular winter sports and a worldwide multi-billion business. With the multitude of sports and leisure activities in today's world, the need to reach consumers by understanding them is extremely important. As in the first case study presented, consumer behavior is the key to understanding the dynamics of the downhill ski industry, as well.

The initial talk with the vice director of supply chain development at Amer Sports revealed that the issue of seasonality is something that Amer deals with constantly, and which is especially evident in the downhill ski business

segment. The wish of the company was to look into the challenges of seasonal demand variation in downhill skiing through different aspects. The case study aims to understand the consumption practices of downhill ski consumers by inspecting different attributes, views, constraints, habits and traditions related to consumption. The accumulation of the interviewees was kept with this in mind, with the aim to address the research question of how seasonal products are consumed.

In this study, *skiing* and *skis* refer to downhill skiing, if not otherwise stated.

6.2 Skis as a seasonal item

Skiing is a clearly seasonal activity in the minds of the producer and of the consumer. A ski manufacturer faces severe seasonal constraints; there is no way around the fact that skiing requires snow. The underlying problems for the manufacturer have to do with managing production and supply chains, as almost 100 % of Amer Sports' downhill ski models are renewed every year (S1). According to Amer Sports, capacity cannot be justified very efficiently because of the long time lapse between placing orders and production: reacting to demand is based on previous data and estimation is key.

The most apparent seasonal phenomenon affecting skiing is that it is practiced in winter. In Finland, the ski season kicks in in November and lasts until March–April in the south and as long as May in the northern part of the country. Compiled from the interviews, the demand and product interest peaks within the season follow a known logic:

1. The start of the season. The skiing season in Finland is generally thought to start off by the Sport and Ski Expo, an annual fair taking place the last weekend of October in Helsinki. Shortly after this, the ski resorts hold their opening weekends, which are heavily publicized in media. The overall effect can be classified as a buzz, which acts as a trigger for the industry and activates skiers. Goods are delivered to the retailers in anticipation of this buzz, in September and October.

2. The Christmas holiday season. A major consumer event of winter consumption items. Interest is high as vacationers head to both the big ski resorts to spend week-long ski trips, and also take day trips to nearby, smaller ski slopes around the whole country.
3. Springtime. The busiest time to practice the sport is in March and April, when the big masses crowd the northern ski resorts.
4. End of the season. When the end of the season nears after the Easter holiday peak, sales drop and retailers must lower prices to sell out stock.

Weather has a clear effect on skiing, since it is the prerequisite for the practicing of it. An interesting phenomenon was described by S4: ski sales in the southern part of Finland are not as affected by the amount of fallen snow, whereas in the eastern and northern parts of the country where snow is more common, ski sales are more linearly dependent on snow. Other respondents were unsure of the actual effects of snowfall. As was noted in previous chapters, the links between seasonal occurrences and the actions based on these are challenging to examine in a mathematical manner.

Top-of-mind views on seasonality varied among the respondents according to the role that they hold within the industry: the manufacturer was more concerned with what happens outside the actual occasions of purchase and consumption – the work is already done and one can hope for the best. The interviewees dealing with sales prioritized the demand peaks, the ski enthusiasts emphasized the act of skiing and the emotions involved, and a sociological view linked seasonality to the social consumption trait of the sport. All of these aspects together formulate the phenomenon of skiing and are all interesting from a marketer's point of view.

Different parties have their own take on the skiing year. S7 accounted seasonality and skiing from a retailer's point of view: Stockmann, Finland's leading department store chain describes the chain of yearly peaks in demand. A notable first peak occurs in October with the well-known Hullut Päivät ('Crazy Days') discount days, where a set of skis is usually included among the promotional sales items. The second peak is triggered by snowfall. The next

peak is accounted by Christmas shopping. Skis are not included in January sales because the last peak is still to come: the national holiday week in February (week 8) is a typical skiing holiday, which is anticipated by clearly elevated sales during the two previous weeks. The new models of the season are discounted no earlier than March. Easter does not cause a sales peak, even though it is an extremely popular skiing occasion – the season is already drying up so consumers are not looking to buy a new set.

To Atomic Skis (S2), the biggest problems and challenges with skis and seasonality are that the brand is *“only really visible three or four months a year”*. Although the season is limited, the ski marketer wants brand interest all year round. A total portfolio thinking (compensating the winter sales by summer products to balance out the year) does not, however, help the winter sports segment. S2 calls this “the compensation trap”. He describes the sales pattern:

The normal year is that you ship like crazy during September and beginning of October, and then when the winter starts and the season kicks in there's a peak, or a request, mainly because of the good sell-through in November and beginning of December and there could be another peak of re-orders after New Year's so we can ship in a second time. (S2)

Balancing between seasons and peaks is crucial, and maintaining an interest towards new products and / or technological adjustments. One way is to introduce new products mid-season, for example in February, when the situational involvement is the highest, which has been tried out successfully by Atomic Skis in Central Europe. Pre-orders are then placed for the next season in September.

The shops [in Central Europe] start to decorate as early as September, when the season starts to kick in. We try to do special promotions and launches inside the season as well, which would extend the season and activate more peaks. (S2)

But in spite of some stray hits and misses, the seasonal pattern is regarded very stiff and the habits of retailers and consumers are hard to alter. Implicitly, the ski marketers also admit that it is useful to follow the patterns as well as possible, thus reinforcing the cycle.

All in all, the challenges of seasonality with the ski industry have to do with constantly balancing demand, interest, production and marketing. The industry

works within the insuperable constraints of the season-bound activity and the marketer must find ways to optimize a balance and do its best to control the consumption patterns within this frame. As snowfall and winter cannot be controlled, attention must be placed in consumer conduct.

As in the first case study, the confrontation of push vs. pull marketing is evident: the ski industry has many patterns which are marketer-driven, as occasions, launches and industry events are planned ahead. Then again, the role of the consumer is ambiguous and it remains in many cases unclear who casts the first dice – the consumer or the marketer. Consumers learn to play by the rules of the marketer, but then again the marketer feels the need to give the consumer what he wants when he wants it.

6.3 Involvement and skiing

It is known that sport consumption displays a wide array of values, attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Stewart et al. 2003), and as the sports world is heavily competed, even the top players must remain constantly alert and on track in the dynamic industry. Involvement in both the product category and the whole sport and lifestyle are viewed by all interviewees as relevant aspects. Images and brands are seen as extremely important. The interviewees agreed that high involvement in skiing is explicitly portrayed and easy to spot. Stewart (ref.) describes high involvement in a sports context as tribal, irrational and internalized – a high level of emotional attachment in other words. The interviewees had a clear view of how high involvement is portrayed in skiing. They referred to highly involved skiers as e.g. “the ski people”, hard-core skiers, pro-skiers and ski buffs – also bringing out different roles that highly involved consumers have in the context. It was also noted that many of the interviewees identified themselves with this group, referring to it as “us”, so it was easy for them to describe the mindset of involvement in skiing.

It can be derived that many highly involved skiers are actually involved with another aspect than skiing as such: sports in general, technology and all-round top-end product consumption or leisure as an entity. The leisure aspect is, however, relevant to all forms of involvement with skiing as consumers

classified as low-involved also consume leisure. This can be depicted through thinking of substitutive activities:

One clear aspect is the outdoor activity thinking, people doing something in the fresh air. But more importantly, it's a social activity, something to do with your family and friends or colleagues. (...) The closest substitutes are probably other forms of recreation, like going to a spa, to the bowling alley or playing pool – they are all closer in a way to downhill skiing than, say, cross-country skiing. (S3)

The charting of involvement is challenging and no unambiguous formula can pin down the phenomenon. S3 accounts that interest is at its highest in the beginning of the season because the triggering effect is so intense. Therefore, situational involvement seems a strong variable to explain behavior related to skis. It was noted that with the highly seasonal activity, involvement can be high even without a year-round active portrayal of this involvement. Interviewees described that the majority of ski buffs do not really think about skiing all summer long. This kind of dormant high involvement triggers again when the season kicks in – this is the buzz mentioned referring to the Sport and Ski Expo, a time when active skiers situationalize again their involvement.

Interviewees accounted that the industry works around these buzzes, occasions of aroused involvement. Several levels of involvement can then occur even with the so-called highly involved skiers: the latent summer behavior, then followed by a baseline aroused involvement through the ski season, on top of which weekends, vacations and industry events stimulate additional feelings of involvement. S4 said he would like to see a Sport Expo type highlight towards the end of the season as well, to maintain the buzz throughout the season:

Now the big competitions and the ski jumping week in Austria and all of these big events are all over way before spring, even though Lapland is still great for skiing until May. The interest kind of dies out even though it shouldn't, so it's a shame. Maybe another big competition or a fair towards the end of the season could work. (S4)

Further constraints arise from the fact that practicing a seasonal sport such as skiing in Finland is challenged because slopes are quite few in number and even the biggest slopes up north are quite small, compared to neighboring Sweden and Norway for instance. This is seen to affect involvement as well –

the trouble of getting to a place where you can practice a sport.

Marketing efforts should take into account the smaller slopes of the south [of Finland], as well. The sport needs presence so people stay interested, not just when they go up north once a year. (S3)

This pattern is clearly linked to sales: consumers are reminded of skiing during the buzzes, and when a buzz is not there, purchase is not inspired either. This all links skiing to social consumption: people want to be a part of what is happening. The televised skiing competitions, Olympics and other industry events were all seen to highly stimulate also low-involved consumers. S3 stated that many people do not want to purchase a new set of skis in the beginning of the season. Then again, consumers are thought to experience heightened feelings of situational involvement when the trigger activates i.e. when visiting an exciting fair and seeing new products. S3 viewed that this feeling should be captured in the moment with a more direct link to the possibility of purchase – for example a coupon with a bundled product incentive, as was mentioned.

They come to the stand [at the Sport and Ski Expo] with their eyes glowing and when they're told that "sorry, these are for display but you can buy them in a month", the feeling disappears. (S3)

It was said that non-sale events are an important way to keep the seasons running smoothly, as they develop the involvement of consumers. But as is seen, it would be beneficial to be able to exploit the aroused situational interest at the moment it surfaces.

6.4 Brand loyalty and skiing

The magnitude of brand loyalty was not inspected thoroughly in this study (having required consumer research), but it can be derived from the interviews that brand loyalty and involvement certainly play a big part in ski consumption, acting as either a quality cue or as more genuine brand loyalty. It was roughly seen that highly involved consumers are brand loyal because of the latter and mass consumers because of the former.

Some competing outlooks were spotted regarding brand loyalty: it was felt that skiers are very brand loyal because once they have managed to make the

complicated decision on the skis the first time, the following times it is easier to pursue the same logic in choosing the brand, which is now known and for which the consumer has developed involvement and a sense of security. Defining heuristics are however hard to pinpoint: another viewpoint was that only highly involved consumers are brand loyal.

One notion made by several interviewees was that Finns being a very winter sports orientated group, brand value is heavily influenced by known sports celebrities endorsing certain brands, especially the alpine skier Kalle Palander and his deal with Fischer – this specific case was noted by four interviewees and viewed by all to have a significant effect on brand preference.

S5 stated that brand loyalty is strongest on the expert and professional side, and on the mass consumer side the role of the salesperson is a more affecting variable to brand election at the moment purchase – the salesperson is then seen as a recommendator. S2 mentioned that deals with ski retailers to encourage salespeople to promote a specific brand have been more or less successful, but that it is also difficult to control the sayings of people. The marginal group of elite consumers, “the true fanatics” or “hard-core skiers” on the other hand are not seen as brand loyal, but rather innovation loyal, meaning that the object of involvement lies in the excitement of new developments, regardless of brand.

More important than year-round involvement was the aspect of maintaining brand interest and positive connotations. For example, both Salomon and Atomic sponsor extreme sports in the summertime to maintain brand interest. S2 mentions, however, that maintaining interest and involvement during the off-season can sometimes be complicated and it is unclear whether the links are too far-fetched. Some ski companies have visibility at ski resorts during the summer season, when the resorts are used for totally different sports and recreation activities, but the desired effects remain unclear:

It's probably more useful to the resort than to the company to sponsor summer sports at resorts. It's hard to see the effects on the actual core business during the season. (S4)

The interviewees felt that tending to in-season involvement is more important than attempting to obtrude onto the consumers' mind at all instances.

6.5 Variables affecting consumption

The interviewees had different manners to classify skiers according to the variables they think affect the consumer the most. An aspect that was addressed was the way the consumers relate to skiing equipment. Skis are more than generic sports products: product development is highly emphasized in manufacturing, and brand traits in marketing, respectively. This dualism was seen to somewhat divide consumers. S2 says that skiers are either technology- or brand-driven consumers. This first group would portray an involvement to technology, and the second group towards quality cues of consumption in general.

Another classification method was the frequency of consumption. S3 lists three classes: the enthusiasts who own the latest gear and practice the sport whenever they can; the mass consumers (including a lot of families) who change equipment less frequently, do not enthuse over technological innovations and take maybe one skiing trip a year to the Alps or to the North; and the last group consisting of those who own skis but are very lazy in practicing the sport.

S4 adds to this categorization a dualism: there are those who want the latest innovations because they truly appreciate the innovation, and there are those who want them because they also consume other products through social acceptance, i.e. when a consumer wants to own the latest and most exclusive in all product categories. Another notion was that ski purchasing often follows the same pattern as a consumer would with other products, as well:

There are people who spend ages at a grocery store comparing products and then those who switch cars in the spur of the moment. So even buying skis can be spur-of-the moment and quick, or really complicated – although the person is not a ski fanatic. (S4)

S6 viewed that it is typical for skiers to link equipment consumption to cultural and societal capital. Different interviewees were observed to view skis as a product in very different ways, by instinct. While one respondent primarily viewed skis as an instrument to consume leisure, another emphasized the technical nature of skis as the primary attribute. S6 also mentioned that the price variable is very strong in evoking involvement, because of the financial commitment. Then again, it was argued that simple consumption items can

arouse strong commitment and involvement responses, too.

Ski purchasing is seen as a multi-step process, where the evaluation period can be very long: consumers can admire new models at a fair, a test-ground or a magazine, and the actual purchase motivation does not have to be relevant. The actual purchasing can take place quite randomly: an advertisement in a newspaper and the convenient price-value aspect can trigger the consumer to go on with the purchase.

Even cheaper skis cost a lot of money, so consumption is not whimsical. It's more about convenience – if it comes across. Then again, sometimes the need can be sudden, for example for a skiing holiday. All in all, ski purchasing is quite last-minute. (S3)

Almost all interviewees stated that ski purchasing in general is last-minute – the need has to be apparent. Amer Sports estimates that 80 % of skis are sold directly before a skiing trip. Highly involved consumers buy in anticipation because they regard the whole season as their playground, not just the random consumption occasion.

No clear statistics were found on how often consumers switch to new skis. Switching to new skis is seen as having multiple purposes: the advanced technology makes the consuming more pleasurable, but social consumption has an evident role. It was seen by the interviewees that technological innovations do not occur on a yearly basis, but rather on a 2 or 3 year cycle, with dramatic changes (or so-called true innovations) every 4 or 5 years. Yearly introductions are often more cosmetic.

It even seems unfair that ski manufacturers do not explicitly inform which new models are actually new in terms of some technological innovation, and which just have new graphics and colors. (...) But it's also a problem in Finland that the skiers don't change their equipment often enough and go on with old skis, so it's also a control method to make them look old [by following rapidly changing cosmetic trends]. (S4)

The price variable is strong with skis for an apparent reason: they are long-lasting hardware products that do not correlate with impulse buying. The aim of the industry is not to sell as many skis as possible to a single consumer, even if this was economically possible on the buyer's side – but rather involve the consumer in a more thorough way: justifying that skis are complex products with different attributes for different consumers. A clear progression of product

design and technological innovation in the skiing industry is that ski models are more and more individualized for a certain type of use, compared to 10 years ago when the industry promoted more all-round skis. Then again, technological innovation is also used as a marketing incentive – as noted by one respondent, in the same way as digital cameras with a long list of features that the average consumer does not even exploit.

An aspect greatly affecting the whole skiing industry is the rental boom in ski resorts. Several notions were made:

- Consumers want to try out new things, and renting is an easy way to test a new type of skis.
- People travel more and renting is often more convenient than carrying around an own set of skis.
- The costs have come down.
- The quality of rental skis has developed and rental shops offer top-end skis for those who are not willing to spend on them by purchasing the set.
- Renting is also good business for ski manufacturers, as rental shops are willing to buy new models more often.
- Renting is not necessarily seen as a threat to ski sales, as it also encourages innovation and product management

Ski marketers do not feel too threatened by the rental boom, but rather accept it as a natural development in the industry. The other interviewees regard it as beneficial to the industry as it incites interest and involvement.

In sum, the variables affecting ski purchasing vary greatly. It was seen that purchasing processes, brand loyalty and involvement do not necessarily correspond. Situational variables affect consumers greatly, and true motivation to make a certain purchase at a certain time is challenging to control.

6.6 The value of appreciation

A common concern of all the interviewees was the appreciation of skis as a valuable item of consumption. Balancing the seasonal pattern has the aim of pleasing everyone, and this is challenging due to conflicting interests. The problem is, everybody is looking out for themselves – the consumers want a good price, the retailers want to cash in on time, and the ski manufacturers want to maximize sales, flexibility with new product introductions and brand value.

It was argued that discounting highly technical items is never beneficial for the brand or the image of the industry as a whole. Traditions live strong also in the ski industry, and if consumers are used to finding good deals on skis at a certain time, they do not want to buy at the wrong time. The interviewees implicitly blamed the “greedy” retailers for the down-valuing of ski products:

The customers know the buzz and they know that in January there are often skis for like 30 % less, so they think that if there's snow coming in December they can still get by on the old ones and buy new ones in January for less. But there's been some problems of retailers dumping out already before Christmas, especially in the last two years when there's been an oversupply. So of course the consumer thinks "why should I buy in October for a higher price?" (S2)

It was also noted that retailers often have a mind of their own and do not follow a systematic sales pattern:

There are several strategies for sales and mark-downs. Some stores keep skis in stock over the summer and then dump them just before the new arrivals come. Some intend to sell out everything at the end of the season. It is not very systematic. (S5)

Some interviewees were very concerned with the consumers' ability to appreciate value and good products, and the price that comes with them.

In Finland, it's the same with everything: nobody is willing to pay for any hobby items and people run around looking for discounts and cheaper items of lower quality, even though the general pricing level is already quite low compared to elsewhere. (S5)

To be able to change the consumers' often stabilized, habitual patterns the marketer has to find some way to offer a proper incentive to the consumer to change his ways. One way for bigger sports stores or department stores to

even out peaks could be home delivery, which was viewed as a possible interesting concept that has yet to be further explored. Customers could try out and choose a pair of skis at a promotional stand at a fair or in the store, and have the skis delivered home at a set occasion, which might aid logistical issues for stores. It must be noted that consumers like habits and consumption patterns stick hard and are often challenging to influence. S2 tells of an unsuccessful seasonal marketing plan of Atomic in Germany: a discount was offered if the customer bought early on, which did not work at all.

A challenge for ski manufacturers is also the afore-mentioned rental boom: when rental shops buy new models more frequently, they easily dump out the older models at a lowered price to consumers, which in turn affects brand value. A way to work around the brand loyalty vs. dumping dilemma is an "out of sight, out of mind" strategy practiced in the industry: the mature markets of Central Europe dump out the withdrawn models to less developed markets in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. S2 reminds that even well-respected fashion brands in the clothing industry are allowed discounts, and this should not be feared with ski hardware, as long as it is done sparingly and subtly. As was mentioned with the Karhu beer brand in the previous chapter, an occasional discount can work as a sporadic hand extension that helps maintain interest in the brand.

6.7 Bundling and product enhancement

One way to influence the consumer could be bundling or product enhancement. Just advising the consumer to buy at a different time does not work, and purely price-based motivation is easily harmful to the producer and marketer. Intersport, the European sports store mega-chain, has had attempts of handing out vouchers with purchased skis that entitle to skiing lessons at nearby resorts. The plan was quite successful. As was mentioned, skiing is generally viewed as an all-round consumption concept: the hard-core skiers portray a clear tribal behavior, but even the less involved skiers relate many feelings to the sport, and this is shown through consumption. Skiing is therefore favorable to bundling. The Sport and Ski Expo, which was said to be the trigger for the whole industry, represents all sides of the industry – a whole lifestyle,

which includes hardware, clothing, ski holidays and resorts as well as associated beverage and other consumption brands that (want to) relate to skiing. One reason is that fairs often have offers, and the ski companies would be obliged to mark down the price for the fair – and this is not what they want to do.

The role of the Ski Expo is not to sell skis, but rather to promote the lifestyle and industry as a whole. Ski manufacturers only present the new models of the seasons, and they're available later on. (S3)

It was seen as relevant for the whole industry to work together, for example by bundling items. Skimbaaja magazine executed a joint effort with a ski manufacturer, where a subscription was bundled with the purchase of a new set of skis. Clear results could not be measured because one cannot surely know what the true motivation of a consumer at the time of purchase is, but schemes like this are thought to be successful.

Another form of product enhancement is customization, which surfaced in some interviews. The possibilities are by most manufacturers yet to be explored, but it was agreed that such personalization could be a tool to motivate purchase and consumption occasions and to affect seasonal fluctuation. A small ski manufacturer, Endd, introduced a marginal hit with a snowboard that was sold with a special coating and a set of coloring markers. As an example, the electronic manufacturer Apple has been able to adjust delivery times slightly with an end-customized iPod mp3 player, where the buyer agrees to wait a while to get the merchandise but gets his name or other text engraved to the back.

6.8 Summary of the second case study

The following table sums up the primary findings of the second case study, highlighting the logic of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4.1:

1. Skis are a clearly seasonal product. Seasonal activity binds the whole industry, and the yearly pattern is also well-established custom-wise. In-season interest and aroused involvement are triggered by various situational variables:

- The role of seasonal variation is evident in the skiing industry, as weather phenomena are a requisite for the practicing of the sport.
- The ski marketer lives by the seasons and the challenge is to exploit the full skiing season, as off-season time is mostly off-season for ski marketing too.
- As is the case with durable goods, the response to responding efficiently to demand variation is constrained by the long time lapse between production and delivery.
- The ski season follows a well-known pattern: the annual Sport and Ski Expo in Helsinki is commonly seen as the kick-off point, followed by heavily publicized resort openings. Christmas-time is the next peak
- The buzz effect of these peaks as well as industry events, such as televised skiing competitions, is important in arousing interest in the product category in all consumer types. People want to be a part of what is happening.
- The magnitudes directly caused by seasonal demand variations are not easily determinable.
- Different interviewees emphasized different takes on the seasonality issue.
- A challenge for marketers is off-season visibility.

2. Involvement in skis is often involvement in a leisure context. Involvement is not constant: high involvement is not active in the off-season and involvement is very reactive to triggers and situational variables even in-season, which creates a challenge for marketers:

- Sport consumers portray highly emotional attachment, i.e. involvement, and the conduct is easy to spot due to a clearly leisure-bound behavior.
- During the season, marketers and retailers are challenged by less interest in between buzzes, i.e. industry events, fairs, professional competitions and holidays and long winter weekends.
- The end of the season drops sales drastically, even though Easter is very heavily linked to skiing and the masses are on the move. Mid-season and end-seasonal buzz creation is seen as a possible solution, but it poses a challenge.
- Non-sales events such as winter sports fairs do not take full advantage of the heightened interest triggered by them, as it is often lost when the possibility of direct purchase is not there.
- The location of the exact sources of involvement is difficult.
- Even high involvement is dormant during the summer. It is triggered again at the start of the season.
- The efficiency of summertime brand marketing efforts is not clear. It is felt that in-season attention is much more important.
- There are different manners to classify ski consumers: e.g. through attitudes to the sport, through the frequency of consumption, through interest in technology, and through trendsetter or early-adopter behavior with all products. It is not clear which links arouse the greatest involvement, and what is then the link to purchasing patterns.
- Ski purchasing is a multi-step process and can include a long time lapse, but the actual purchase can be quite random, triggered by situational effects such as an offer in the day's newspaper.

- Ski purchasing is generally last-minute: the consumer typically waits for the need to surface, i.e. right before a holiday. Highly involved skiers buy earlier, because they want their equipment ready at hand all the time.

3. The role of push vs. pull demand and marketing is not clear, as both the consumers and industry actors guide the modalities with their own patterns, but simultaneously follow the logic of each other. Traditions, habits and customs thrive due to the strong social role of consumption:

- Traditions and habits play a significant role in both consumption and commercialization. The ski season highlights and buzzes are shared knowledge between everyone, as are sales times. This configuration affects the purchasing, consumption, involvement arousal, and also pricing, and creates in its rigidity a challenge if one wishes to work around the pattern – which is a wish of many.
- It is not always clear whether the consumers act according to the marketer's logic or vice versa. Patterns and customs invented by marketers and / or retailers are evident, but the consumer also has control over consumption and purchase occasions.
- Social consumption is important. Leisure is heavily linked to skiing and it can be derived that many beer drinkers are involved in consuming leisure rather than skiing or skis.

4. The roles of involvement and brand loyalty are overlapping. Skis are a complicated technological product with both functional and emotional elements, which complicates the source of the actual triggers to the consumer's involvement:

- Involvement and brand loyalty are often overlapping and hard to distinguish, and thus worth inspecting together. Heuristics are hard to come by and different parties have different views on the emphases.

- Brands can act as a quality cue, or as a permanent preference.
- Competing outlooks on the brand issue exist: brand loyalty can be seen to arise from purchase satisfaction, which then eases further purchases. Highly involved consumers are said to be brand loyal, then again the marginal "elite skiers" are said to be technology- and innovation-driven, regardless of brand.
- Skis are complex products portraying different attributes to different consumers.
- The effect of sports celebrity endorsement on brand choice is seen as functional.
- Ski purchasing and consumption can be brand-driven or technology-driven.
- Technological innovations come by every two or three years and true innovations more sparsely. Yearly introductions are mostly cosmetic.

5. The relation between price and appreciation is a challenge for the ski marketer combine. As purchasing and consumption witness strong seasonal variation, the marketer has a hard time keeping involvement, importance and value at a constant level. The timing of new product introductions and price reductions require careful balancing:

- A common concern in the industry is maintaining product appreciation and value. Down-pricing is seen as harmful to individual brands as well as the whole product category and industry.
- The rental business is quickly developing, and it is seen a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a good opportunity for brand and product visibility, and arousing involvement when trying out is made easy. On the other hand, it can be a threat due to rental shops dumping out products at the end of the season.
- Another concern with the value issue is price reductions of retailers, which cannot be controlled by the ski companies.

- An underlying challenge is that all parties seek their own benefit: the consumers want a good price, the retailers want to cash in on time and the ski manufacturers seek maximized sales and brand value, as well as flexibility in new product introductions.
- Skiing is favorable to bundling. The effects of product and service enhancements such as customization and home delivery are yet to be further explored, although there is positive attitude to such marketing efforts in the industry.

Table 5: Consuming downhill skis as a seasonal product

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter the central findings of the empirical study are brought together with the review of literature. Conclusions are then made and managerial implications given.

7.1 Discussion

The aim of this study was to inspect the phenomenon of seasonality in the context of two different product categories. The theoretical inspection was completed examining two different fields of marketing literature: seasonal studies and involvement studies. This combination was found to be helpful in deciphering the research question: how are seasonal products consumed?

The two case studies were inspected separately, and in this part the two are brought together in cross-analysis. Although the two product categories and their consumption modalities show their clearly distinct features, it was noted that various common constraints, opportunities and challenges can be derived from the studies, with the shared aim of shedding light on the subject of seasonal consumption on a larger scope.

The links between the theory and the empirical findings of both cases are congruent in many ways:

- **Seasonality is a multifaceted phenomenon, including holidays, weather, the temperate seasons and free-time.** Both skiing and beer are affected by these various sides. Skiing is more strictly restricted by seasonality, as it requires snow and cold weather. The link of beer and seasonality is nevertheless evident, as seasonal occasions coincide with demand peaks.
- **Psycho-seasonality is evident.** The skiing world has a clearer seasonal pattern in terms of the temperate climate. Wintertime is characterized by snowfall and cold weather, but industry traditions guide the perception of the temperate season: winter is kicked off by an

industry event (Sport and Ski Expo) and ends in the accustomed last skiing week, Easter. In beer consumption, the weather in May is said to give a strong hint on the consumption of the summer months. A way to control the perception of seasons well beyond their occurrence is the introduction or re-introduction of seasonal products. It was seen in the theory that marketing efforts strongly guide the perception of seasonality, as was seen to occur with both skis and beer.

- **Consumers are known to have strong associations to seasonality.**
In beer consumption, seasonal specialties are strongly awaited and new seasonal product introductions are welcomed. The skiing world lives according to an accustomed yearly rhythm, characterized by traditional events that guide the consumers' perception of the seasonal variation.
- **The role of traditions and habits is strong** – as is the case in both skiing and beer consumption. Beer is linked to certain holidays and occasions, and the purchasing methods and quantities follow a social conduct pattern. The purchasing and consumption of skis is also rigid as consumers have learned to purchase and consume at a certain time. **Push and pull in demand and marketing** is therefore difficult to chart: in both product categories the consumers, marketers and retailers simultaneously guide others with patterns and adapt them from each other. A challenge in both industries was seen as the contradicting roles between different parties: the consumers often seek the lowest price and most convenience, the retailers want to maximize their gain, and the manufacturer and marketer are the ones concerned with maintaining brand value and product appreciation.
- **A leisure-derived involvement** arose in both studies as the primary portrayal of consumption of the seasonal items. The theory showed that a leisure link is especially apparent in sports. The empirical study showed that also in a beverage context the foremost portrayal of involvement is through social consumption, a sense of togetherness, and leisure.
- **The effects of seasonality are hard to quantify and the impacts on consumer conduct are hard to pinpoint.** A challenge for both the

skiing and the beer industries is that seasonality is known to instigate certain behaviors, but the exact stimulus-action patterns are hard to trace. This pattern complicates further the push vs. pull confliction.

- **The timing of new product introductions is challenging.** Seasonality by definition links certain consumption to a certain time and place, but the role of habits plays a big part: a lot of seasonal introductions derive from industry patterns, which are accepted and promoted, although not seen as necessary *per se*. In literature, marketers are seen to lack courage to work around the seasonal modalities and when the consumers have learned to live by them, the push vs. pull aspect again arises. Ski introductions are made by custom at the beginning of the season and beer introductions greatly run by the retailers' logic, so the concept of "true" demand from the market is blurred. It can be inducted that renting skis and trying out specialty beers work along a similar manner: giving a glimpse of a novelty in an easy manner, and aiming to build stronger involvement with the product category by keeping it exciting.
- **Involvement is an important and useful concept.** Although the terminology is admitted in literature to be confusing and over-lapping, the concept conveniently displays the personal motivations to product usage. When examining brands, marketing, purchasing and consumption, the discussion of involvement can be used to carry through the different elements. Involvement levels were seen to guide both beer and ski consumption. It was suggested in literature that often consumer goods (such as beer) are prone to low involvement, where as durables (such as skis) are prone to high involvement. However, the empirical study showed that involvement can vary greatly within the category, and even typical low involvement products such as beer can include deep motivations and connotations to consumers in a seasonal context.
- **Involvement is not static.** The location of an involvement level such as high, low, enduring and situational is not straight-forward as consumers do not act according to strict logic. It was seen that **situational**

variables greatly affect the consumption of beer and skis. In skiing, high involvement is often dormant in the off-season, and is triggered again through industry buzzes, which also spark up the otherwise lower involvement: the more enduring involvement of ski buffs is transferred to less involved consumers with seasonal buzz. In beer, seasonal introductions and the strong-lived and loved seasonal traditions likewise act as triggers to involvement. Therefore, seasonal changes in general can be said to trigger involvement.

The theory was not entirely applicable to the case study. What arose as an important aspect in both cases was the complexity of roles of the product category, which was not especially discussed in literature. Especially with beer, the product can have differing meanings simultaneously. The aim of marketers is also to foster different takes on the product and the volatility then derives from both sides of the market, leading to challenge the marketing efforts. In addition, the relationship between price and appreciation was defining to both case studies, although not arising in literature.

The literature on involvement introduces many competing definitions and classifications of involvement. At the same time, it is stressed that studies are highly case-specific. In conducting the empirical research, it was noted that the terms are hard to apply in a logical manner. In this study, involvement in the empirical case studies was addressed mostly through the more everyday concepts of high vs. low involvement, with some references to enduring vs. situational involvement. The concepts of ego vs. purchase involvement were left to be discussed implicitly.

8.2 Conclusions and implications

In short, the answer to the research question of how seasonal products are consumed is clearly: in a complex manner. To understand consumer behavior modalities, a broad perspective is needed. This is why all possible (and sometimes opposing and overlapping) features, accounts and views of products, brands, consumers, industry constraints and general habits should

be considered interesting from a marketer's point of view. The concepts of involvement, importance, brand loyalty and other consumption variables, along with marketing, retailing, purchasing and consumption patterns all collaborate to the phenomenon of seasonal consumption, which can only be understood by the sum of these.

This study serves as an introduction to the consumption of seasonal products, mirroring previous research to two specific case studies of two different seasonal products. Management-wise, the interests lie in business implications. Some recommendations for the participating companies derived from this study are:

- **The concept of involvement should be recognized and embraced** in order to understand deeper motivations to consume a product at a certain time. Seasonal variations when connected to industries with well-established and rigid traditions and patterns demand a true understanding of the consumer.
- The marketer should **find ways to capture the triggers of situational involvement**. In the skiing industry the mentioned buzzes guide the modalities of the whole market. A less involved consumer experiences heightened interest at these times and this feeling should be exploited. The end of the season need not be the end consumption, and creating buzz events throughout the year would help keep involvement at a more constant level.
- **The product category choice should be emphasized before the brand choice**. In beer marketing, the conduct should be seen to derive from further than brand choices: involvement is linked to the concept of leisure, which the product category than only portrays. Therefore, in both cases, the true motivation to build attachment to the product category hides behind the actual product. This should then be mirrored to how a certain brand corresponds to the needs of the product class, and not purely within the context of the brand.
- **The price vs. appreciation dilemma** that plagues both product categories could possibly be overcome by finding and promoting the

true motivations of involvement.

- **The set-up of push vs. pull marketing and demand thinking** should be inspected: do the points of purchasing and consumption derive from the marketer's or the consumer's side? The marketer should boldly challenge the apparent obviousness of the conventions.

Examining statistical data can help de-riddle some important aspects of seasonal consumption. It is, however, the accentuation of this study that true accounts from consumers, behaviors and underlying motivations are the most helpful in deciphering the modalities of industries dealing with seasonal products. In order to build even better brand features the seasonal marketer should examine what arouses and triggers involvement at different times and in this way, build longer lasting and less habit-dependent customer behavior.

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